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Bernadette Soubirous

Bernadette of Lourdes

The Only Complete Account of Her Life
Ever Published

The Only English Edition
with many pictures
and the autograph of Bernadette

Entitled in French
La Confidente de l'Immaculée

Bernadette Soubirous

en Religion Sœur Marie-Bernard
des Sœurs de la Charité de l'Instruction Chrétienne de Nevers
Par une Religieuse de la Maison-Mère

Translated by J. H. Gregory



St GILDARD, NEVERS, FRANCE

1926

Nihil obstat.

Angelus Mariani
S. C. Adv.
Sacr. Rit. Congregationis Assessor.

Imprimatur.

Nevers, 8th December 1926.

† Pierre,
Bishop of Nevers.

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SECRETARYSHIP OF STATE
OF
HIS HOLINESS.

THE VATICAN,
July 5, 1913.

Most honoured Superior General :

Our Holy Father, Pius X, has accepted with pleasure the work entitled "La Confidente de l'Immaculée," by a religious of your Mother-House, which your filial piety has inspired you to lay at his feet.

The August Pontiff desires to compliment the author of these edifying pages upon the pious intention she has conceived of contributing to a fuller knowledge of the life of the humble girl, who was flooded with such signal favours by the Queen of Heaven, and as a religious spent twelve years in your Mother-House at Nevers.

As a pledge of heavenly favours, His Holiness vouchsafes with all his heart, to you, to the author of this work, as well as to all your family in religion, the Apostolic Benediction.

Together with my thanks for the copy which you have been good enough to offer me, I pray you to accept, Most honoured Superior General, the assurance of my deep regard in Our Lord.

CARDINAL MERRY DEL VAL.

LETTER FROM HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL DE
CABRIERES, BISHOP OF MONTPELLIER

BISHOP'S HOUSE,
MONTPELLIER.

Reverend Mother :

August 17, 1912.

I am deeply indebted to you for your kindness in sending me the beautiful volume you have just published entitled : "Bernadette Soubirous, la Confidente de l'Immaculée."

I already owed to the generosity of your Reverend Mother General a touching photograph of this holy child, and had the

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joy of accompanying Mgr. Gauthey, then Bishop of Nevers, in a visit of devotion to her grave, after having officially borne witness to her virtues.

I was not alone in desiring that Bernadette, celebrated in the first instance by Mr. Henri Lasserre and, after him, by the most eloquent voices in every language of Catholic Christendom, should in due time receive the tribute of her own community, the most authorised of all, coming as it does from the eye-witnesses of her life and death.

Henceforth this desire is satisfied : we are in possession of the authoritative life of Bernadette Soubirous, the simple narrative of her childhood and adolescence up to her fifteenth year.

From 1858 to 1879 Bernadette belongs to you. Confided to your care at Lourdes, it was there that I had the unexpected honour of seeing her, on the occasion of my accompanying my then Bishop, Mgr. Plantier, to Eaux-Bonnes.

Before the Diocesan commission assembled by the Ordinary to pronounce upon the virtues of Bernadette, I confined myself virtually to a repetition and confirmation of the judgment of the Bishop of Nîmes, formed, if I am not mistaken, as early as 1850, and already a forecast of the verdict which, I trust, the Church itself by the mouth of the Sovereign Pontiff will some day pronounce on the privileged child of the Immaculate Conception.

From Lourdes to Nevers, from Nevers to her last resting place at St. Gildard, during a period of more than thirty years, the humble child of the Pyrenees lived under the eyes of your sisters; they watched her growth, educated her and supplemented the inspirations of directly supernatural origin with that definite religious instruction which nothing can replace. By their example and good works they attracted her to their life, their novitiate, their vows, to their existence at the same time active and contemplative and aided the Divine Gardener to render her such as His jealous love desired, meet to blossom as one of the fairest flowers in his Paradise.

None are so fitted as you to speak of her and reveal her to us. However imposing the marvels of Lourdes may be, Ber-

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nadette, the Child of the Apparitions, will always remain the central figure and marvel of the mystery enacted in the Grotto of Massabielle.

Her personality, as depicted in the interesting pages you have consecrated to its study, reminds us once again, that of all masterpieces, the noblest is a human soul made perfect by the grace of God.

CARDINAL DE CABRIÈRES,
Bishop of Montpellier.

LETTER FROM MONSEIGNEUR CHATELUS, BISHOP OF NEVERS

BISHOP'S HOUSE, NEVERS.
April 7, 1912.

Beloved Daughter :

I have read with deep interest your work entitled "*La Confidente de l'Immaculée, Bernadette Soubirous, en religion Sœur Marie-Bernard, des Sœurs de la Charité et de l'Instruction Chrétienne de Nevers.*"

The facts of the apparitions are treated, as is proper, soberly and simply, in accordance with tradition, and in terms which convey clearly a sense of their supernatural origin.

You were more fitted than any one else to write the second half of this work, to reveal Bernadette, no longer the Child of the Apparitions, but transformed into Sister Marie-Bernard of Nevers.

You are actually living in the Mother-House where she spent twelve years of her life and which is still redolent of her holy memory. At every step you are face to face with traces of her passage. You are at the fountain-head of a living tradition; religious who knew personally Sister Marie-Bernard are still living to tell you what they themselves have seen and heard; you have at your disposal her notes, which are like a mirror reflecting her pure soul; none could better treat of her religious life than yourself, possessing, as you do, all the necessary documents at first hand.

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And how well you have succeeded in penetrating into the soul of Sister Marie-Bernard and extracting its sweet odour of piety, its deep humility, its immense love of Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin, its spirit of mortification and penance, its cheerful acceptance of suffering, its continual prayer for sinners!

Calm on the surface, the soul of Sister Marie-Bernard was, in its depths, in perpetual ebullition, devoured by a constant desire for more perfect self-sanctification, for more complete immolation to Our Lord.

Nevertheless, in her inmost consciousness she revelled in the ceaseless contemplation of the vision of the Immaculate Virgin, that same vision which on no less than eighteen occasions had filled her with celestial rapture in the Grotto of Massabielle.

Other works had already given us the Bernadette of the Apparitions; yours reveals chiefly Bernadette the nun : you have written it from your heart, the heart of a Sister of Charity of Nevers, full of sisterly piety. Its perusal cannot be otherwise than instructive and edifying.

Her personality is henceforth inseparable from that of Mary Immaculate; the Apparitions suggest necessarily the souvenir of Bernadette. Our Lady covers with her robe of world-wide splendour her favourite child.

She draws her into her orbit wherever the story of Lourdes is told and has not its fame gone forth to the ends of the earth?

Moved by Divine Providence the Church will perhaps one day by a solemn decree proclaim her " Blessed " to whom our Lady in her third apparition on the 18th day of February, 1858, promised the joys of Heaven.

What rejoicing would then fill the Catholic world! How great would be the honour reflected upon your beloved congregation! What a treasure house of graces would be opened in our own Dioceses!

Whilst awaiting the moment fixed in the divine counsels for her glorification we piously watch over her tomb, entrusted to our soil of Nevers, and send up our fervent

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prayers to heaven. Let your readers join their own to ours with a view to hastening the realisation of our hopes.

I Leg you to accept, beloved Daughter, together with my compliments, the assurance of my paternal affection in Our Lord.

† PIERRE,
Bishop of Nevers.

LETTER FROM MONSEIGNEUR GAUTHEY,¹ ARCHBISHOP OF BESANÇON

ARCHBISHOP'S HOUSE,
BESANÇON.

June 14, 1912.

Reverend Mother :

Bernadette of Lourdes is already familiar to all; few have followed her to St. Gildard de Nevers, where she became Sister Marie-Bernard.

Is appears probable that in the near future the little Messenger of our Lady may aspire to the aureole of sanctity!

It was important that the Christian public should be as well acquainted with her religious life as with her life as a young girl at Lourdes. None could depict the former with more accuracy than a religious of the Mother-House of Nevers, where Bernadette passed thirteen years of her life, in the Convent which is still redolent of the sweet perfume of her humble and yet heroic deeds.

From your pages her winning personality gradually detaches itself. We follow her to the novitiate, the infirmary the sacristy : humble, candid and mortified wherever she passes.

Her superiors keep her in the background : she finds such pleasure in the hidden life that she conceals herself voluntarily. Her obedience is prompt. Her gay and childish nature, at times inclined to become headstrong and self-willed, is gradually rendered supple by the action of grace.

¹Bishop of Nevers, 1906-1910.

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and by the trials to which she is submitted. Her simplicity renders her sympathetic, whilst her almost uninterrupted sufferings engage our pity.

The Blessed Virgin knows that in order to find favour in the eyes of her Divine Son it is necessary to take up one's cross and follow Him. She made her favourite child understand this thoroughly : "I promise you happiness, not in this world, but in the next." Sister Marie-Bernard allowed herself to be moulded by the hands of her superiors and fashioned most completely in the school of sorrow. She developed patience and meekness under the weight of her cross.

Were I obliged to describe her spiritual characteristics, I should mention simplicity, innocence, poverty, humility, prudence and patience.

She learned to smile at her cross as in other days she had smiled at the gracious Apparition amongst the rocks of Massabielle. There, the radiance of the vision illuminated her entire being. The bystanders exclaimed, "How beautiful she is!" At St.Gildard, on her bed of suffering, in the armchair where she expired, she was still more beautiful; whilst, when all was over, the indelible imprint of sanctity dwelt upon her beloved remains, to the admiration of all beholders.

You have feelingly described her childhood, the apparitions with which she was favoured, and her youth at Lourdes. It was necessary so to do in order to complete her portrait; but it has been your singular privilege to draw aside the veil which concealed her life in the cloister. Your work will be gladly welcomed by all religious communities, and devout Catholics in the world will learn therefrom an essential lesson, that the souls even of the elect are no exempt from trial in the crucible of affliction.

To behold the Blessed Virgin — how singular a favour! To cultivate her humility, to remain hidden and of no account when one has been the central figure in the eyes of the world, to accept suffering and to learn to love it, after the pattern of Our Lord, how far superior a privilege!

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Therein lies the secret of sanctification. You have not failed to accentuate this.

Your pages brought to mind the first Diocesan Commission,¹ which I had the consolation of bringing to a successful termination, and which will always remain one of the cherished memories of my life.

Wishing you, Reverend Mother, every blessing in our Lord,

†FRANÇOIS-LÉON,
Archbishop of Besançon.

LETTER FROM MONSEIGNEUR SCHOEPFER, BISHOP OF TARBES AND LOURDES

BISHOP'S HOUSE,
DIOCESE OF
TARBES AND LOURDES.

NOTRE DAME DE LOURDES.
16th July, 1912.

54TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
18TH AND LAST APPARITION
OF THE IMMACULATE VIRGIN
TO BERNADETTE SOUBIROUS.

Reverend Mother :

I have just completed the perusal of the work entitled "*La Confidente de l'Immaculée, Bernadette Soubirous, in religion Sœur Marie-Bernard*," and in closing the book I desire to offer you my cordial thanks for having revealed to me in a certain measure the soul of the beloved and pious child of the Apparitions.

I thought I knew her, if to know her is to live in constant contact with her memory, to admire the miracles which it has pleased God to work by her instrumentality, even to invoke her intercession instinctively, at least in private, and to rejoice by anticipation in the supreme honours which the

¹Mgr. Gauthey in his capacity of Bishop of Nevers presided in 1908 over the Diocesan Commission which instituted the process of Sister Marie-Bernard.

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Holy See may possibly deign one day to bestow upon her, confirming thereby the beatification already pronounced by Celestial Visitor of the Grotto.

I already knew her, if to know her is to sympathise with all she loved, desiring that the whole universe might answer to her appeal, to the echo of the voice of the Immaculate Virgin and flock to honour the Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ, in the spot where she deigned to appear to the favoured recipient of her secrets, the privileged child of her maternal affection.

But I must candidly confess my knowledge of Bernadette was superficial, limited from a spiritual point of view to the indications visible on the soul's external envelope, beyond which it is given to no mortal eye to penetrate.

You, Reverend Mother, have probed deeper; your privileged position permitted you so to do. A common vocation admitted you and your fellow religious to familiarity with Bernadette, to a life of intimacy with her. Her personality was only destined to be fully revealed in the soft twilight of the cloister, in the privacy of the holy family, where, as at Nazareth, chosen souls are in communion of mind and heart.

Those who read your simple and artless narrative, will at once realise that it has been penned by an eye-witness in possession of full information and dictated by a profound veneration for the heroine.

Your sympathy is contagious; it diffuses the light and warmth of strong faith and deep affection; we are subdued by the charm which attracted all who had the consolation, we may say, the special grace, of seeing Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes or Sister Marie-Bernard at Nevers. So indelible was the stamp imprinted upon her features by contact with the Immaculate Virgin!

Bernadette Soubirous — Sister Marie-Bernard, the two names define two very distinct periods in the life of your holy companion. During the first, the daughter of the poor miller appears crowned with the aureole of the Apparitions; she moves, if not in a "*star swept dream*", at least in a pious

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exaltation, surrounded by the divine realities in which she lives, breathes and her being. Such is the splendour of the supernatural atmosphere in which she is wrapped that to look upon her is to feel close contact with the unseen. In spite of the loving veneration which surrounds her before the miraculous Grotto and which follows her to the sordid dwelling of the Soubirous, her humble simplicity of soul remains intact. She appears devoid of self-consciousness and, if it were permissible to adapt the words of the Apostle, she desires to know nothing but the Blessed Virgin — the Blessed Virgin whom she has seen on eighteen occasions amongst the rocks of Massabielle. She is, and desires to be, nothing else but the living witness of Mary Immaculate.

What she has seen and heard she is ready to repeat either in the face of popular enthusiasm or of the prudent reserve of the clergy. She is equally affirmative when submitted to the cynical threats of magistrates and police, whose extraordinary pretension seems to have been to be more eager to defend the purity of Catholic doctrine than the Church itself. Wherever and whenever she is questioned her answer is the same; she speaks because she cannot do otherwise, "*Non enim possumus quæ vidimus et audivimus non loqui.*" She speaks as the incorruptible witness of our Lady of Lourdes, the Heavenly Visitant whose herald she was chosen to be to the children of God.

When her task is done and the future of Lourdes assured, so far as in her lies, we shall see her disappear, or rather she disappears unnoticed from the stage where she has played the double rôle of Seer and Prophetess.

She flees joyfully to bury herself in the solitude of the cloister. Joyfully! — in spite of the inevitable pang experienced in tearing herself away from the scenes hallowed to her by the marvels of the Apparitions, for within her she bears an inexhaustible spring of happiness, a storehouse of imperishable souvenirs and the certainty of going to Nevers as truly in obedience to the call of God and His Immaculate Mother, as in other days she wended her way to the miraculous Grotto.

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To do the will of God, was the one desire of her soul, her life's solitary ambition.

Herein lies the distinctive savour of her career, the keynote of her life as it is known to us from the 11th February, 1858, or even earlier, to her dying day.

What other motive had she than to do the will of God and His Immaculate Mother, from the day when in spite of her timidity she sought her venerable pastor to deliver the message of the Lady of the Grotto, to that other day twenty-one years later when, her sufferings over and at the point of death, she opened her arms like her crucified spouse and cried, "*My Jesus how I love Thee!*"

This devotion to the Divine Will, Reverend Mother, as exemplified in the life of your holy companion, the history of which might at first glance appear exclusively destined to circulation amongst religious houses, offers a very practicable and by no means unattainable example to the emulation of all truly Christian souls. In the life of Bernadette, judging from appearances, and setting on one side the temporary episode of the Apparitions, we can trace nothing extraordinary.

Prayer, work, obedience, charity, simplicity, resignation in suffering, abandonment of self in the hands of Divine Providence, union with our Lord Jesus Christ through tender devotion to His Immaculate Mother, of such supernatural threads is spun the web of Bernadette's humble existence. A consuming love whose intensity was only known to God irradiates its tissue; if individually we cannot hope to love with equal fervour, we may at least tend toward this ideal, following the beaten track which her feet have traced and levelled for us.

Thanks to you, Bernadette will continue unceasingly the apostolate in which she engaged from the very commencement of the Apparitions. Through your lips, Reverend Mother, she will unceasingly plead with readers: "*Do penance! Pray for all sinners! Raise an altar to the glory of God in your inmost heart. Detach yourselves from the vanities of this world. Accept suffering as from the hand*

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of God, welcome it as a certain means of union with your crucified Saviour. Approach Jesus through Mary; *she will promise you happiness, not in this world but in the next.*"

We can imagine how her power for good will be increased when it shall please the Holy See to raise to our altars the humble servant of God, whose mission began on her knees in the miraculous Grotto. All true children of the Blessed Virgin will hail with joy this event, marked, as it will doubtless be by a fresh outpouring of grace from Lourdes all the world over.

Rest assured, Reverend Mother, of my sincere devotion in Our Lord, to yourself and all your family in religion. In the name of Our Lady of Lourdes, I bless you and your companions and beg your prayers in return.

†FR.-XAVIER,

Bishop of Tarbes and Lourdes.

TO OUR LADY OF LOURDES

"The Son of God, bending over the world which His hands had made, looked down upon the children of men, and His gaze dwelling upon the humble Virgin of Nazareth He exclaimed : Behold the Tabernacle of My Glory. The Word was made flesh."

Nineteen centuries later, O! Divine Mother, thy gaze was bent upon thy beloved France. Amidst the battlements of the Pyrénées, in the shadow of the eternal hills, thou saw'st in a town unknown to fame, an innocent shepherdess and saidst : Here do I set my throne, here shall I confide myself to an innocent and unspotted soul. Lourdes became "the smile of God, and the caress of the Immaculate Virgin." Bernadette became her confidante and messenger.

"Lourdes and Bernadette! humilities personified that shine and speak to us." Your unsuspected sweetness attracted the King of Heaven, whose earthly predilections remain unchanged in the bosom of the Beatific Vision: witness the instruments chosen by His Blessed Mother to teach the world a lesson in humility.

One winter's evening found me kneeling in the sacred Grotto. Around me all was still, my soul was filled with light as I gazed upon Our Lady's face and prayed her with loving confidence. I had heard a cry from many lips: "Show us Bernadette; raise the veil which conceals from our eyes her hidden life" — and I hesitated. Were the fingers of a saint not necessary to draw music from this celestial harp? I dared not wake its strings, fearful that they might ring false beneath my touch.

But when the call of obedience came, I remembered that a prompt response often suffices to work miracles.

I remembered also, Most Holy Virgin, that "thou art the first and purest, the tenderest of all loving souls whom it

is good to seek, not only in the day of trouble," but also in the hour of helplessness, and I came to thee, placing my pen in thy fingers and making a great hush within me that thou mightest speak.

At length I fell on my knees at the foot of thy shrine; thou didst seem to smile upon me from thy granite throne, thy throne of audience, thy mercy seat, before which rise continually our prayers and thanksgivings.

Thou hadst already deigned to give me the plan of the work I was to write, to detail and name for me each petal of thy favourite flower Bernadette "to whom it pleased thee to show thyself more a mother than to any other", the child thou didst admit to thy intimacy and crown with thy favours.

Under thine eyes, supported by thine invisible aid, I passed for two months the sweetest moments of my existence. in continual communion with the soul of her who merited by her purity and humility to be chosen for the Herald of the Queen of Heaven.

I saw as in a vision a poor and ignorant shepherdess alone admitted to the Grotto where the Mother of God waited to reveal herself; I saw "the splendours of grace burst forth from the depths of obscurity;" I heard the cry of joy from thy full heart, O Immaculate Mother! for that a new name had been given to thee.

I saw Lourdes, blessed by thee, grow into a national sacrament of penance; I heard thee cry: "Let the proud-minded pray, the erring heart do penance, the froward will learn obedience by pilgrimage and procession to this spot."¹

I saw her whom thou didst choose as thy messenger to mankind, voluntarily seek solitude, a solitude filled with the love of Jesus, of Mary and of the souls they hold so dear.

I saw her clasp suffering to her heart as one welcomes a dearly loved friend, and finally render her pure soul to God in a ecstasy of prayer, humility and love.

The Church watches over her resting place, the eyes of the faithful are unceasingly lifted toward her.

¹Mgr. Izart.

What I have seen I have told; my testimony I lay at thy feet, O Blessed Mother. My pen has fallen short of my desire; thou canst make good my shortcomings. "A mother is the monstrance wherein her child lies displayed." Dare I pray thee to plead thyself the cause of thy favourite child?

Shouldst thou deign to answer my prayer a sweetness will distil from these pages, unworthy as they are of thy chosen messenger, whereby souls will find strength to face the dread of self-sacrifice, religion will become real and living, and prayer will flow spontaneously from the springs of self-denial.

By these signs, Oh Divine Mother, shall I know that thy blessing has crowned my efforts.

Nevers, March, 25, 1912.

PART FIRST

LOURDES



LOURDES

I

EARLY YEARS

JANUARY 7th, 1844, was a day of rejoicing in the mill of Boly (in the Lapaca quarter of Lourdes). François Soubirous, the miller, and his wife, Louise Castérot, had just received from Heaven the gift of their first child.

In this humble Christian dwelling smiling faces welcomed the newcomer. Who can say that the very angels did not recognise in her cradle "the child of Virgin preference" and were not whispering already the joyful anthem: "Lourdes, of the land of France, no longer shalt thou be the least amongst her cities; in the folds of thy hills shall appear the Queen who shall draw all the nations of the earth to her feet"?

Two days later, on the 9th of January, the Abbé Forgue, Dean of Lourdes, baptised the child, to whom was given the name of Marie-Bernard.¹ Prophetic choice! Under the familiar diminutive of Bernadette the name "Bernard" was to achieve a second immortality.

In the following July, the miller's wife, expecting another child, was obliged to put Bernadette out to nurse at Bartrès, a village some two miles from Lourdes. She was confided to the care of Marie Lagües, whose married name was Aravant, a good Christian woman, still mourning an infant taken from her by the hand of God.

¹After St. Bernard, Doctor of the Church, famed for his particular devotion to the Blessed Virgin.

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To her foster-child she transferred her care and affection, and it was only after a stay of fifteen months beneath her roof that Bernadette returned to her own home in October, 1845.

At this time the family was in easy circumstances; but their resources gradually diminished, owing to the mismanagement of François Soubirous, who, since his father-in-law's death, had taken charge of the mill.

François, somewhat inclined to be indolent, was wanting in care and attention. He produced flour of inferior quality, and was often too easy-going to demand payment for work done on credit. Added to this, he was far from thrifty, a failing which he shared with Louise Castérot, his wife—"kind-hearted, courteous and hardworking, but withal too generous, since hardly any of the good wives who came to grind their grain ever left the mill without a bite and a sup."¹ Blinded by her love for her husband, she troubled very little about his improvidence. As their revenues shrank, their expenses increased with their growing family, and it was not long before the wolf was at the door.

In 1855 the Soubirous were unable to pay their rent. Evicted from the mill, they took a house in the same quarter, and sought to earn their bread by daily labour. When work was lacking, they became destitute.

Unable to pay their rent, they moved from place to place, through every quarter of the town, until, having reached the end of his resources, François begged a relation of his wife to harbour them in a house he owned in the Rue des Petits-Fossés. This building was no other than the old gaol of Lourdes and was popularly known as the "cachot."

Bernadette meanwhile had grown, but her health was poor. Asthma, to which she was destined to be a

¹Père Cros—Récits and Mystères.

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victim all her life, had already declared itself, accompanied by terrible spasms of the chest, at times so violent as to leave her prostrate. Her parents gave her every care in their power. Instead of the maize bread which formed the ordinary fare of the family, they bought for her a little white bread, and even from time to time "a little wine, to which they added a lump of sugar." The author of *Souvenirs Intimes d'un Témoin* relates that this diet might have helped the child's weakness provided she had always got what was intended for her; but the other children, too young to understand the reason for these indulgences, broke out into open revolt when they found themselves alone with their elder sister, who, nevertheless, was a great favourite with them all. These precocious little communists exacted their share, and when it was not forthcoming had no scruples about resorting to active measures. Bernadette was too good-natured ever to complain.

During the winter of 1855, which was more than usually severe in the Pyrénées, Bernadette's aunt, Bernarde, invited her god-child to stay some seven or eight months with her, and treated her throughout as one of her own children. After this visit Bernadette returned to her home in the Rue des Petits-Fossés, and remained there till the summer of 1857.

Neither was she forgotten at Bartrès; whenever she came to Lourdes, Marie Aravant "slipped into the bottom of her basket a bunch of flowers, some fruit, a home-made cake, or some trifle, as a surprise for Bernadette, who remained deeply attached to her fostermother. Several times every year Bernadette went to Bartrès to see her."¹

Towards the end of the year 1857 Marie Aravant asked Bernadette's parents to let her have Bernadette to look after the children. They knew that this only

¹Estrade—"Souvenirs Intimes d'un Témoin."

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meant changing one home for another, and willingly gave their consent; but, instead of giving her the care of the children, they put her in charge of the sheep, and more especially the lambs.

The whole appearance of the little shepherdess attracted sympathy. "Her large, dark eyes were full of expression, her hair was almost as black as ebony, her face plump, her mouth a trifle large, her voice full of kindliness; she was always gentle, smiling and lovable."¹ In spite of the continual suffering which her asthma entailed, she was gay, cheerful and uncomplaining.

Aravant himself was often exacting, hard and grasping. This was no secret, and often kind-hearted neighbours, who loved the girl, added to her daily allowance of oat bread a little fruit or other delicacy, which she accepted gratefully. "I shall eat my black bread first," she would say whilst thanking them; "yours is whiter and nicer, and I shall keep it for the finish."

So the girl's days were spent on the hillsides around Bartrès. She could neither read nor write, but her pure lips murmured incessantly the *Pater*, *Ave*, and *Credo*, perfuming the solitude like a lily in the wilderness. Over this Lily angels hovered, whilst the girl herself, gathering with loving hands the wild flowers that lay about her, wreathed garlands to lay upon the rustic altars she built with scattered stones in honour of Mary, her Mother and her Queen; but her most imperishable offering was a ceaseless chaplet of *Aves*.

When the Angelus rang out from the neighbouring belfries, the shepherdess knelt and prayed, amid the hush of nature, raising her innocent soul to her Maker—touching and sacred idyll destined by God

¹Barbet, *Bernadette Soubirous*.

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to serve as the prelude to a celestial and mysterious epic!

Bernadette played with her lambs, above all with the smallest, her special pet. "From time to time," she says, "he would come and knock over the little shrine I had made for the Blessed Virgin; but I easily forgave him, and, instead of punishing him, gave him bread and salt, which he loved."

"But why was this one your pet?" she was asked.

"Because he was so little, and *my heart goes out to all little ones.*"

"Once when my father came to see me," she said, "he found me watching my sheep and very unhappy. He wanted to know what was the matter; so I replied: 'Just look at my sheep—some of them have their backs all green.' He replied, laughing: 'All the grass they have eaten is coming out on their backs; I daresay it will kill them.' Whereupon I burst into tears. My father, seeing my distress, comforted me, and explained that the green mark was the brand of the dealer to whom they had been sold. My simplicity was doubtless a little surprising, but, but," added Bernadette candidly, "I did not know what a lie was, and I believed everything I was told."

Happy child, whose pure and limpid soul was to merit Heaven's benediction!

Another story is told by creditable witnesses. One day, when Bernadette had led her flock to graze on the hillside, there was a sudden storm-burst. Aravant, who could see her from the house, made signs to her to come back at once, but some time was lost in collecting her lambs. At the end of the village the road was crossed by a brook, unbridged at that time, save by stepping-stones for pedestrians.

Arrived at the brook, which she had crossed without difficulty the same morning, the child found it swollen beyond its bounds, flooding the road and rendering the passage of her flock an impossibility. In her

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trouble and anxiety she made the sign of the cross. Instantly the waters parted; on the one hand, hanging motionless, as if restrained by an invisible power; on the other, continuing their normal flow, and leaving the roadway dry. Bernadette passed with her flock, and immediately the torrent resumed its natural course.

Some time previously the Abbé Ader, Curé of Bartrès,¹ an intelligent, cultivated priest, full of piety and zeal for souls, had met Bernadette and been struck by her modesty and candour. "If," he said to the schoolmaster, Monsieur Barbet, who was with him, "my idea of the appearance of the children who figured in the manifestations of 'La Salette' be correct, this little shepherdess must resemble them." He was far from supposing that his words were in a way prophetic.

Bernadette at fourteen had not yet made her first communion. It had been arranged that she should be sent to school to learn her catechism, but work of one sort or another had always prevented the realisation of this project.

Nevertheless, her foster-mother, a good Catholic and conscious of her duties as head of her household, took in hand the religious instruction of Bernadette, whom she looked upon as her own child. Every night, in the hour before bedtime, she sought to impart to her the elements of Christian Doctrine. Bernadette had never learnt to read, and her unpractised memory retained with difficulty what was said to her. "Repetition was useless; I was at my wit's end," said Marie Aravant; "so much so that, losing patience, I would sometimes fling the book away, saying, 'Good Lord! you will never be anything but a stupid igno-

¹In reality he was officially designated Vicar only. In this connection it is useful to note the inversion of the terms Curé and Vicaire in French as compared with their English equivalents Vicar and Curate.

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ramus!' " Bernadette, ashamed, would reply nothing; oftentimes she would put an end to the scene by twining her arms around her foster-mother's neck in an affectionate embrace.¹

The poor child, already united with God through prayer and suffering, longed ardently to receive the Holy Eucharist. To this end she desired her parents to take her back, "as she wished to return to Lourdes in order to make her first communion."²

The early days of 1858 saw her again restored to the family circle in the Rue des Petits-Fossés. We have visited this single room, dark, damp, with its plasterless walls and worn flags. A single window, looking towards Massabielle, was all that gave light to this later-day Bethlehem. Crossing the threshold, one kneels instinctively, as if in a sanctuary. It was here that Mary chose the poor child and made her the Confidante of her heart, the Messenger of her pity and her love.

However poor the home was, it did not lack real nobility; no family in Lourdes was more assiduous at its household devotions. Bernadette, the eldest child, repeated the prayers aloud, and the voices of the little ones blended with those of their parents in the "Evening Sacrifice." Every Sunday the week's toil was sanctified by assistance at Divine Worship; at Easter, and even oftener, the parents knelt together at the Holy Table.

Mutual love and fruitfulness sanctified their union, which was eight times crowned with the blessings of maternity.¹

"The children honoured their parents as their parents honoured each other; correction, when necessary, was administred without injury. No complaint

¹Estrade, *Souvenirs Intimes d'un Témoin*.

²From her own statement at a later period.

¹The eight children of François Soubirous and Louise Casterot were the following :

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ever passed their lips; so that a certain dignity and joyousness was never wanting to family life in the cachot,"² where Bernadette was henceforth to be more and more the guardian angel of her brothers and sisters.

What matter if a veil of obscurity hid their sordid existence? if they were clad in mean raiment, and want were a daily guest at their board? The hour draws nigh when all these humble surroundings shall be lit up by the splendours of the Mother of God.

1° Marie-Bernarde (Bernadette), born 7th Jan., 1844; died 16th April, 1879.

2° Jean, born 13th Feb., 1845; died 10th April, 1845.

3° Toinette-Marie, born 19th Dec., 1846; died 13th Oct., 1892.

4° Jean-Marie, born 10th Dec., 1848; died 4th Jan., 1851.

5° Jean-Marie, born 13th May, 1851.

6° Justin, born 28th Feb., 1855; died 1st Feb., 1865.

7° Bernard-Pierre, born 10th Sept., 1859.

8° Jean Soubirous, born 4th Feb., 1864; died 11th Sept. same year.

²Père Cros, *Récits and Mystères*.

II

THE APPARITIONS

“**A** MIGHTY sign is to be manifest at the Grotto of Massabielle.”¹ So ran the tradition which hung about the cavern hollowed by the hand of nature in the primeval cliffs of rock² lying to the west of Lourdes.

There is nothing forbidding about the spot: the shallow cavern is flooded with light; the branches of climbing shrubs intertwining form a rustic framework; the waters of the Gave roll boiling incessantly at their feet.

Far in the background the giant summits of the Pyrénées loom in impressive solitude; nearer at hand the green-clad hills billow against the horizon. The mountains seem to crouch and kneel as at the feet of some majestic and half-divined presence. All the landscape seems folded in expectancy awaiting the fulfilment of the prophecy that has been spoken.

From generation to generation tales of terror had been rife in the countryside of happenings in the cavern, the threshold of which no stormbound shepherd would cross without making the holy sign.

The foreshore of Massabielle had been from time immemorial the special domain of Mary. “The land had been granted to her; for the town and dependencies of Lourdes had since the ninth century formed part of the domain of Notre Dame du Puy, and in confirmation of this glorious vassalage, pilgrims from Lourdes had yearly for centuries journeyed to the

¹Père Cros—*Récits and Mystères*.

²Whence “Massabielle”, i.e. ancient pile of rocks.

shrine of Notre Dame du Puy and decorated it with greenery from Massabielle, as if to say—"Come, our rock of Massabielle is your own property."¹

First Apparition

It was the 11th of February, 1858, the second anniversary of the day upon which Pius IX had declared the erection of the statue of Notre Dame du Puy to be a *pious and national undertaking*.

It was the hour of noon, and the Angelus was sounding from every belfry in the Pyrénées. Bernadette with her sister Toinette² and Jeanne Abadie, one of their little neighbours, set out to gather firewood on the banks of the Gave, crossing on their way the meadow adjoining Massabielle.

At the period of which we write a channel from the main stream, destined to feed the Mill of Savy, wound around the rock. The waters of the Gave were low so that a ridge of sand and pebbles emerged between the two streams. The mill-race itself was slack, the mill being closed for the day. Having reached this point in our narrative we cannot do better than let Bernadette speak for herself, transcribing simply the details of the first Apparition as we find them set down in her own personal notes:

"The first time I went to the Grotto was to gather firewood with two other little girls. When we got to the mill I asked them if they would like to go as far as the point where the mill-race joins the river. Upon their consenting, we followed it till we found ourselves in front of the Grotto.

"Seeing that they could go no further, my two playmates waded through the stream which barred our way and I found myself left all alone on the farther side. I begged them to help me throw stones into

¹Père Cros—*Récits and Mystères*.

²Later known as Marie.

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the water so that I might get a foothold and cross without wetting my feet, but they replied that I had only to do as they had done. I went a little farther along to see whether it was possible to cross without taking off my shoes and stockings, but to no purpose. Seeing this was so I returned to my original position in front of the Grotto.

"I had barely time to pull off the first stocking when I heard a sound like a gust of wind. Turning my head toward the meadow I saw the trees were unmoved.

"Beginning again to take off my shoes and stockings I was interrupted by the same sound, and as I raised my head looking in the direction of the Grotto, I saw a Lady in white. Startled and fearing my eyes deceived me I began to rub them,—to no purpose, for she was always there. Putting my hand in my pocket I drew out my rosary, but when I tried to raise it to my forehead to make the sign of the cross, I was helpless to do so; a great awe paralyzed me. I then saw the Lady in white take the rosary she held in her hands and make the sign of the cross. Following her example, I tried again and succeeded. Immediately all my disquietude vanished. I fell on my knees and said my rosary in the beautiful Lady's presence. When it was done she beckoned me to her; I did not dare approach, whereupon she disappeared.

"I then started to pull off my other stocking to wade through the water in front of the Grotto and eventually we all started off home.

"On the way I asked my companions whether they had seen anything—'No,' they replied, 'did you—'Oh, no,' I said, 'if you saw nothing neither did I.' I did not want to tell them anything, but they begged so hard that I gave way on condition that they should keep the secret. Contrary to their promise, the first thing they did on getting home was to tell what I had seen.

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"This occurred on Thursday, February 11th, 1858."

Bernadette's account goes no further, but history tells us that her mother, fearing the girl was being tricked by some illusion, forbade her return to the Grotto. The maternal fears were not lessened when the same night Bernadette broke into tears whilst repeating aloud the evening prayers. The mother again forbade her to return.

"We went to bed," continues Bernadette, "but I could not sleep. The tender, gracious face of the Lady was continually in my mind: in spite of all my mother had said to me I could not bring myself to believe that I had been deceived."

Second Apparition

(Sunday, February 14th)

Meanwhile a superhuman and resistless power drew Bernadette towards the rock, which had become transfigured in her thoughts: but her mother's prohibition remained to be overcome.

On Sunday morning, February 14th, after High Mass in the parish church, five or six of Bernadette's young comrades, anxious to accompany her to the Grotto, pleaded with her mother, who at last yielded to their importunities after imposing the strictest directions.

Passing before the church, the little group fortified themselves with holy water and at last reached the rocks of Massabielle. They were solitary and deserted. The whole party knelt down and commenced to repeat the rosary. "*She is there!*" suddenly cried Bernadette,—"*She is smiling!*" The young girl's face was suddenly illumined. She approached the Vision, and sprinkling holy water as she went, cried: "*If you are a messenger from God, come.*" The Lady smiled again, advanced and bent over Bernadette. The child knelt and remained motionless, pale and in ecstasy.

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A stone thrown from the summit of the rock failed to interrupt her holy vision.¹

But so transformed were the features of the little shepherdess, her companions began to be afraid. Her sister Marie feared "she was going to die." They desired to break the spell and even the Miller Nicolau, who was enlisted to take her away from the Grotto, was dimly conscious of the nameless awe always inspired by the near approach of the supernatural.

Even on the way back the mysterious Presence was visible to her eyes. At length the Vision disappeared and Bernadette became herself again. Her mother, who had been summoned, arrived in haste, disposed to administer a sound correction, but the miller's wife, haunted by the child's face as she had seen it transfigured by the ecstatic vision, bade her hold her hand, crying, "*Do not strike your daughter; she is an angel!*"

Thenceforth, Bernadette's sole preoccupation was the Lady of the Grotto. She reviewed her inwardly as she had appeared, unspeakably fair, graceful and majestic, beyond the child's powers of description. In after days all human comparisons drew from Bernadette a pitying smile.

When confronted with women of rank and beauty she would say: "*Oh, elles ne peuvent pas y faire!*"² "*My own Lady is fair . . . fairer than them all!*" Here is her portrait after the descriptive details given by the little child herself:

"The Virgin was clad in a garment of radiant whiteness gathered in gracefully close against the neck, with close-fitting sleeves. Her head was covered with a veil down to the forehead, thence it fell upon her shoulders, its rippling folds barely touch-

¹The stone had been thrown by Jeanne Abadie, who reached the Grotto later than her companions. She herself recounted the incident fifty years later with tears in her eyes: "Alas, that stone lies heavy on my heart! Fancy that I should have thrown it at the Blessed Virgin."

²Meaning in her native dialect "All comparisons are useless."

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ing her arms and dropping on each side to her feet. She wore a blue girdle looped about her waist, its wide ends plain and unknotted floated loose in front, reaching well below the knees. Her bare feet were just visible beneath the hem of her robe, and upon each was a full-blown yellow rose. From one arm hung a long rosary of pure white beads strung on a shining yellow chain with a crucifix yellow like the chain.¹

Third Apparition

(Thursday, February 18th)

On February 18th, after assisting at Holy Mass, Bernadette set out very early for the Grotto accompanied by Madame Millet and Mademoiselle Peyret, a member of the sodality of the "Children of Mary." Upon this occasion they had fortified themselves with a blessed candle, as a defence against the wiles of the Evil one; they were also furnished with pen, ink, and paper, so that the mysterious visitant to the Grotto might put her desires in writing.²

In spite of her asthma, Bernadette kept ahead of them all with surprising activity. No sooner had they arrived at the rock than she exclaimed, "*She is here!*" Yielding immediately to the charm of the mysterious Lady who had smiled at her exorcism of the previous Sunday, the same fair and gracious Lady to whom she had already "dared to give her childish affection," she stood on tip-toe before the wild-rose bush at the entry of the Grotto and begged her to write down her wishes.

"There is no need for me to write what I have to say to you. Will you do me the favour of returning here every day for a fortnight?"

¹Extract from the "Annales de N.-D. de Lourdes 1st year."

²Mademoiselle Peyret had an idea that the visitant might well be the deceased President of the "Children of Mary," who had passed away some months previous, and came, possibly, to ask for their prayers.



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Upon the child's assenting, she added: "*I do not promise you that you will be happy in this world, but in the next.*"¹

Bernadette's face on this day showed happiness and a joyful emotion, but there were no outwards symptoms of ecstasy. Monsieur Estrade points out,—“That the Lady being about to speak desired that the child should hear her voice whilst calm and in full possession of her faculties.”

“Ask the Vision,” said Madame Millet, “whether my presence here is distasteful to her.” Bernadette raised her eyes to the rock, and turning, said: “The Lady replies — No, her presence is not distasteful to me.”

Bernadette became once more absorbed in prayer, interrupted from time to time by secret converse with the Visitant.² This lasted for about an hour; then all was over.

“She looked at you a long time and smiled at you,” said Bernadette afterwards to Mademoiselle Peyret. At first this latter was little affected; but later she owned that “she was living on the memory of that smile.” Madame Millet and Mademoiselle Peyret accompanied Bernadette to her home and said to her mother, “What happiness for you to have such a child!”

Fourth Apparition

(Friday, February 19th)

Bernadette's mother seeing her daughter's calm and confidence felt her own apprehensions weakening. What Bernadette told her of the celestial beauty and goodness of the Lady made her hope that the mani-

¹This has frequently been rendered, “I do not promise to make you happy in this world, etc.,” but the literal sense of the dialect is, “I do not promise you that you will be happy in this world, etc.”

²Up to the moment when the Blessed Virgin declared herself, Bernadette always made use of the terms “Lady,” “Vision.”

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festations were not attributable "to any wiles of the Evil one." She therefore insisted that her husband should permit the child to return to the Grotto during the fortnight promised.

The arrangement had not been kept a secret, and when Bernadette reached the Grotto on the morning of February 19th, accompanied by her mother and her Aunt Bernarde, quite a little *cortège* had already gathered about them.

Bernadette fell on her knees, raised her rosary to her forehead and made the sign of the cross. In an instant the material world had vanished from her sight. Her soul was plunged in transports of ecstasy. Her entire being thrilled with holy joy; she smiled at the Vision, straining towards it, as if about to take wing. Her mother, spellbound with fear and admiration, cried:

"My God, I implore Thee do not deprive me of my child!" Others exclaimed: *"How beautiful she is!"* The trance lasted about half an hour,—a half hour of heaven!

Bernadette when she recovered consciousness described how during her dialogue with the Vision a tumult of sinister voices rose as from the direction of the river, calling and replying one to another and clashing in an infernal discord. One voice dominating the others cried: "Escape! Escape!" A single glance of the Lady had sufficed to calm the uproar. Doubtless Satan had foreseen the designs of heaven on the miraculous Grotto, and sought to defeat them in the first instance by alarming the child. This was his first attempt; many another was to follow!

Fifth Apparition

(Saturday, February 20th)

The little group which had been present at the Grotto on the 19th was the forerunner of the famous

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“Crowds of Lourdes.” The rumour of the apparitions had spread not only to the town of Bigorre, but to all the outlying villages. Bernadette’s name was on every tongue; she occupied increasingly popular attention. Some jeered, others were indifferent, but many already suspected the identity of the mysterious Visitant.

Sightseers flocked from all directions; commencing by hundreds, the visitors to the Grotto were soon numbered by thousands. To catch a glimpse of Bernadette in ecstasy, they perched on the damp and slippery slopes of the cavern, or even contented themselves with a point of vantage on the other side of the river. No effort appeared too great to gain a place on the rocks facing her. Many gave up all hope of getting within reach or even sight of the child, but yielding to an ever-increasing attraction they continued their attendance.

Bernadette herself passed through the midst of these crowds seemingly unconscious of their presence.

“I saw nothing,” she declared later to a religious. *“I was too much wrapt in contemplation of her who was about to appear to me.”*

She would advance and kneel on a stone in front of the rock which was jealously reserved for her. “This is Bernadette’s place,” was explained to newcomers. She would repeat her Aves, her eyes fixed on the niche. Soon her features would become transfigured, and the crowd, conscious of the imminence of the supernatural and inexplicable, would seek to read upon her face, clothed with a mysterious charm, the imprint of the unseen. To describe her appearance was almost impossible, an attempt, however, was made which we quote:

“Bernadette, though comely, did not possess that rosy freshness which charms us in a childish face; her beauty was of a higher and unworldly type.

“Her face was of an extreme pallor but delicately

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shaded, as if transparent to the light; a rosy tint barely perceptible on her lips and cheeks relieved this marble whiteness. The radiant glance of her wide, upturned eyes was alive with eagerness and enthusiasm; beneath their motionless lids they seemed riveted, as by a ray of light from on high. Occasionally her lips moved faintly, but for the most part remained closed without effort.

"The reflection of a great joy caused her face to break into a smile, arrested ere hardly it was born. Its indescribable sweetness full of admiration and respect, mingled with intense love, spoke of the nearness of a mighty and benevolent Presence. From time to time two tears, welling from under her fixed eyelids, trickled down, like dewdrops on the smooth surface of a leaf, without spreading against the whiteness of her cheeks. Her kness pressed against the bare rock, Bernadette seemed to strain heavenwards, and such was the expression of her upturned features that she seemed about to rise into the air.

"As regard the Vision,¹ in the first place a faint brightness would hover over the cavern and the rock. Gradually all the surroundings would be lost in the increasing brilliancy. The Virgin "would appear standing with her feet upon the wild-rose bush. She would greet the child, smile and incline her head a second time, then with the cross attached to her rosary make the holy sign with a dignity and piety beyond description.

"At certain moments Bernadette would seem more completely absorbed in contemplation of the Vision, as if hanging on its utterances. She must frequently have spoken to the gracious Visitant, but no ear was privy to their confidences!"²

¹The details concerning the Vision are given after Bernadette's own words.

²Extract from the "Annales de N.-D. de Lourdes, 1st year."

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Speaking generally, the characteristics of the several Apparitions followed the lines of the foregoing sketch, but each individual manifestation was distinguished by some special feature, which we shall endeavour to indicate.

Subsequent to that of February 20th—the fifth—Bernadette, after passing three-quarters of an hour in ecstasy, announced that the Lady had taught her word for word a prayer for her own personal use. What could have been this prayer, coming from the heart of the mother of God? None ever penetrated the secret, but, faithful to the commands of the Lady, Bernadette repeated it daily all her life. For this statement we have her own authority.

Sixth Apparition

(Sunday, February 21st)

Bernadette reached the Grotto at six o'clock in the morning and was greeted with enthusiastic acclamations, to which she paid no attention. She could hardly make her way through the assembled crowd.

Upon this occasion she was destined to convert to a belief in the supernatural an eminent physician, Doctor Dozous. He had made up his mind to attend personally, "hoping to demolish with a word all this puerile display of neurotic mysticism." Nevertheless, his first glance at the Ecstatic convinced him that the case lent itself with difficulty to a medical solution. He satisfied himself that Bernadette, even in ecstasy, retained the full use of her faculties, that she was capable repeatedly of passing her candle, when extinguished by the wind, to a neighbour to be relit, that her pulse was calm, and her circulation normal. He felt convinced that it was the finger of God made manifest. Nevertheless, before admitting himself vanquished, he retourned several times to Massabielle, —we shall have occasion to speak of him again,—

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and later he became "one of the most ardent champions of Our Lady of Lourdes."

The Doctor remarked that during the course of this sixth Apparition Bernadette's face became suddenly sorrowful and tears coursed down her cheeks. The Lady, diverting her eyes from the child, had turned them afar with an expression of sadness. Then, returning again to Bernadette, she had exclaimed, "*Pray for sinners.*" Almost immediately her face had resumed its normal expression of celestial rapture.

Her recommendation, which had sunk deep into the child's heart, was destined thenceforth to occupy a great place in her life.

Trials

The transfiguration of Bernadette had filled all the witnesses of her ecstasy with profound wonder and enthusiastic admiration. In every street and household the conversation turned exclusively on the occurrences at the Grotto, to such an extent that the local authorities deemed it their duty to interfere. We shall revert to this later on. For the moment let it suffice to state that the "Procureur Impérial," Monsieur Dutour, was the first to endeavour to persuade Bernadette not to return to the Grotto. Vanquished by the child's simplicity and determination, he attached little importance to his failure; but Monsieur Jacomet, the then superintendent of police at Lourdes, flattered himself that he would promptly put an end to what he believed to be "a not disinterested comedy." His threats had such an effect on Bernadette's father that he forbade his daughter to return to the Grotto in future.

This took place on the Sunday evening.

The following day Bernadette set off to school, her basket on her arm. Her parents had strictly enjoined upon her not to "turn out of her way either to the right

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or the left." In the morning all went well, but after her scanty mid-day meal when she was returning to the Hospice, and had reached the point where the road turns from the "pont des ruisseaux" to the Hospice, "an unseen barrier stopped her way." Every attempt to advance was useless: an invisible force drew her in the direction of the Gave, and she soon found herself in front of the Grotto. After the exterior tribulation of the evening before, the child was destined to suffer an interior trial, for the Vision did not manifest itself. The local sceptics were already intoning a hymn of triumph: "The Lady," they said, "is afraid of the *gendarmes*, and with only little further activity on the part of our clever Jacomet, she will make up her mind to climb down from her rock and change her abode."

God, however, knows how to bring good from evil: Bernadette's distress became so acute that her father, unable to bear the sight of his daughter's grief, withdrew his prohibition. From that time on she was at perfect liberty to go to the Grotto when she would.

Seventh Apparition

(Tuesday, February 23rd)

She went there the following day after Mass.

This time she was not disappointed; the heavenly Visitant came to console her little favourite. Suddenly Bernadette seemed to awake to a new life. Her eyes shone with an unearthly light; an angelic smile played about her lips; mysterious confidences seemed to be passing between her and the ineffable Presence visible to her ravished gaze.

At one moment listening, all ears, she seemed thrilled with joy; at another, humble and tearful, she seemed wrapt in prayer. This seventh Apparition is distinguished by the revelation of the "Secrets." Mary raised the humble child to the sublime rôle of *Con-*

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fidante and bound her to her heart by the “threefold secret” which Bernadette bore inviolate to the grave. This same day witnessed the conversion of Monsieur Estrade, “Receveur des Contributions indirectes” at Lourdes, credited locally with a certain intellectual superiority and wit. With Doctor Dozous, who was again present, he realised that the moment for theorising was past, and that it was a time for veneration and not for further speculation.

Eighth Apparition

(Wednesday, February 24th)

Up to the present the Lady of the Grotto’s intercourse with Bernadette had been of a personal and private nature.

She had made herself mistress of the child’s heart, which she was moulding and fashioning to suit its ultimate mission.

By the oft-repeated marvels of the ecstasies she had prepared the people to acclaim the child whom she had already honoured with her confidence, and who was called to be her messenger to the whole world. At the eighth apparition the stage widens; Bernadette, interrupting the rapture of her ecstasy, her voice broken with sobs, repeats to the onlookers the words fallen from the lips of her heavenly Visitant: “*Penitence! Penitence! Penitence!*”

Leaving for a moment the child of her adoption the Divine Mother turns to that countless family over whom her pitiful heart yearns,—to all sinful souls, whom she calls to repentance and penance, that they may merit the divine forgiveness.

The solemn silence pervading the assembly was for a moment broken by the intrusion of a Police Serjeant who forced a passage through the crowd, and confronting Bernadette exclaimed: “What are you doing here, you little comedian?” Bernadette remained

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unmoved, but hostile murmurs rose from those around, and the official judging prudent to effect an honourable retreat, backed out after having fired his proud parting shot— "Fancy such follies being possible in the nineteenth century!"

Ninth Apparition

(Thursday, February 25th)

This is the day whereon the Heavenly Visitant was to call from the earth the miraculous spring, destined to gladden the "City of Mary," to increase faith, confound science, conquer pain, heal, purify and impart new life to souls as well as bodies. But the inauguration of this modern Pool of Siloam was to be the occasion of a fresh humiliation for Bernadette. "Go," said the Lady, "*drink and wash at the spring.*" The child turned towards the river, but upon a sign from the Vision stopped and looked uneasily about her on all sides, raised her eyes again as if for directions and finally went towards the left corner of the Grotto. She bent down and dug the earth with her hand, and almost immediately the little hole filled with muddy water; after having three times raised some to her lips she finally drank, washed her face, plucked a blade of grass, and ate it.

The eye witnesses of these bizarre proceedings, even those who had professed the greatest veneration of the ecstasies at which they had been privileged to assist, and had felt in their inmost souls the presence of the supernatural, suffered a momentary "eclipse of their faith." They wondered if the young visionary was not bidding farewell to her senses, and if her critics were not, after all, in the right.

Nevertheless, recovered from her trance the child showed no signs of mental disturbance, and what was more, her temporary discomfiture seemed to have

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borne fruit, for a tiny trickle of water issued from the spot where Bernadette had dug the earth.

Little by little it increased in volume and had soon hollowed out for itself a channel in the surrounding soil. The following day no doubt remained of the miraculous origin of the spring which had newly burst from the rock of Massabielle.¹ The sufferers of five continents were destined later to sing its praises. Bernadette's reputation was replaced on its original footing and the glory of the Blessed Virgin magnified."

Tenth Apparition (Friday, February 26th)

Upon her arrival at the Grotto, Bernadette evinced no surprise at the sight of the spring in constant flow. After having crossed herself she drank and bathed her face.

The Heavenly Visitant designed on this occasion to give her a deeper insight into the mystery of the reparation. Bernadette was already wrapt in the bliss of ecstasy when she heard these words: "*Bend down and kiss the ground for the sake of all sinners.*" Immediately the artless child bent her head and pressed her lips to the earth. Not satisfied with her own humiliation, but following doubtless a secret inspiration, she drew all those surrounding to do likewise. The unearthly majesty of this child, who, upon her knees, issued her commands to the crowd inspired wonder and confidence. The finger of God was already visible in these mysterious occurrences; the favours of His Blessed Mother were already half divined. Massabielle was upon the point of becoming the Grotto of the Transfiguration.

¹The celebrated expert in hydrology, the Abbé Richard, after a careful survey of the site, affirmed that in his opinion an invisible spring existed at Massabielle previous to the Apparitions. "The Miracle," in his opinion, "consists in the fact of its discovery from the detailed indications of the Blessed Virgin to Bernadette, pointing

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Eleventh Apparition

(Saturday, February 27th)

Faithful to her promise Bernadette during the whole fortnight continued her visits to the Lady of the Grotto. On the morning of the 27th her intimate colloquies, raptures, and contemplation were of more than usual duration. "At a certain moment," said Bernadette, "the Lady seemed to withdraw into herself and be lost in meditation." Breaking this silence, which in the divine dispensation is a sure sign of great things to follow, she said: "*Go and tell the priest that a chapel should be built here.*"

Bernadette returned from her vision thoughtful and preoccupied. The thought of confronting the Curé alarmed her. "Though he is so good," she said, "I am more afraid of him than of a gendarme." However, her mind made up, she set off for the presbytery. It may be remarked here that the Curé of Lourdes, Abbé Peyramale, was "a tall ecclesiastic of commanding presence and stern features, straightforward and outspoken, possessing, however, a sterling heart."

He had taken no part in the doings at Massabielle, thereby setting an example of prudence to the clergy of the town. Had an Apparition really occurred at the Grotto, or was Bernadette simply the victim of an illusion? Moreover, putting on one side the theory of an illusion, was the supernatural Visitant of celestial origin? What if it were the Father of Lies? Such were the hypotheses which presented themselves to his mind. Intelligent, serious, and non-committal by instinct, he left the final word to Providence and waited.

out its position and commanding her to go and drink at the spring." Also in the cures of every nature effected by its waters, innocent as they are of any active ingredients of therapeutic value, added to the corporeal and spiritual phenomena which have made of Lourdes a midway house between earth and heaven.

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Bernadette found him in this frame of mind. He received her coldly, and they were soon engaged in a dialogue, in the course of which the good Curé did not fail to make the most of every objection, and even employed a little sarcasm; but timid and unlettered child of the people, as she was, Bernadette replied respectfully and firmly, so much so that he remained dumbfounded. At his request Bernadette gave a detailed account of everything she had experienced at the Grotto up to date, and as she spoke, the Curé's emotion increased; he recognised that he was face to face with a "soul transparent as crystal." A secret instinct caused him to identify the Mother of God under the features of the Lady of the Grotto. But concealing his impressions he dismissed her saying: "Listen, my child; tell the Lady who sent you that the Curé of Lourdes is not in the habit of dealing with people whom he does not know and that in the first instance he insists on knowing her name and having some evidence that she has a right to it. If your Lady is entitled to a chapel she will be at no loss to understand the meaning I attach to my words; if she does not understand, tell her that she may spare herself the trouble of sending any further messages to the Rectory."¹

Twelfth Apparition

(Sunday February 28th)

On the 28th of February more than two thousand persons had already gathered at the Grotto before Bernadette's arrival. She was accompanied on this occasion by her Aunt Lucile. "She was soon the centre of a zone of human heads, packed closely on both banks of the stream. In the foreground of this living amphitheatre, amidst a dead silence, the child's angelic features, reflected upon the upturned multi

¹Estrade—"Souvenirs Intimes d'un Témoin."

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tude of faces an unearthly radiance." The Heavenly Visitant was prompt in her arrival.

The interview was of a private and confidential nature: doubtless Mary was preparing her child for the mission she was destined to accomplish.

When Bernadette, her ecstasy finished, desired to approach the rock so compact was the crowd that progress was impossible. Two soldiers belonging to the garrison of the fort, who happened to be present, came of their own accord to help to make a passage through the crowd. "Make way," they shouted; and one of them under the influence of his excitement turned and exclaimed to his companion, in barrack-room slang: "Very likely they'll try and stuff us up with the story of the Apparitions being a put up job. By heaven! if the fools in our dormitory try it on me I'll settle them!"

Thirteenth Apparition

(Monday, March 1st)

The manifestation of March 1st gave rise to a little incident which was misrepresented in the hostile press: "This morning," they wrote, "the oracle was not in the vein of inspiration; so to enliven her performances with a little variety, she adopted the role of priestess. Putting on an air of authority she invited her dupes to hand up their rosaries and proceeded to bless them wholesale." The facts were actually as follows:

Bernadette had that day consented to satisfy the desire of a devout person, and taken her rosary to use in place of her own at the Grotto, but no sooner had she begun to make use of it than the Blessed Virgin interrupted her. Drawing her own from her pocket she showed it to the Heavenly Visitant, and continued her prayer.

Ever since the day when Bernadette had invited the

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crowd to kneel and kiss the earth, the majority of those present imitated her every gesture. When they saw her, as they thought, offer her rosary to the Lady of the rock, they joined their action to hers in an enthusiastic ovation.

When she came to herself Bernadette explained the real meaning of what she had done. Those present had the consolation of knowing that they had been the victims of misunderstanding. The Blessed Virgin had, nevertheless, read aright the love in the hearts of her people.

Fourteenth Apparition

(Tuesday, March 2d)

Prayer, transfiguration and spiritual rapture followed one upon another and were blended during the course of this fourteenth Apparition. Nevertheless, Bernadette rose from her knees visibly preoccupied.

The Lady of the Grotto had not only told her to ask the priests "to build a chapel at Massabielle," but had added:

"I desire to see processions made to this spot." Such was the message the child was charged to convey to the Abbé Peyramale, from whom, as she wrote later, she was destined to receive "a cold reception." She begged her Aunt Basile to go with her, but the latter had as little hardihood as her niece. "When I meet the good Curé," said she, "my legs give way and I feel all of a tremble." However, she consented to go to the Rectory with Bernadette.

At the word "Procession" the Curé could no longer contain himself: "My poor girl," cried he, "this is a fitting climax to all your stories. Either you are lying or the Lady who speaks to you is only playing a part.

"If she were really the one under whose features she masquerades she would know that I am not qualified to take the initiative in such a manifestation. She should have sent you to the Bishop of Tarbes and not

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to me. However, to go straight to the point, if the Lady is really she whose name you suggest I can offer her a means of establishing her identity. You say she is in the habit of standing over a wild-rose bush: you have only to ask her to make it bloom suddenly one of these days in presence of the crowd.”¹

Bernadette’s only reply was a smile and she left immediately with her aunt.

The rose bush did not bloom! but is it man’s place to impose such a miracle upon God? What need was there for an isolated prodigy of this kind? Did not miracles flourish in sufficient abundance at the Grotto? What of the repeated transfigurations of this simple peasant girl? What of the flocking crowds, the startling conversions, the cures already wrought by the water which had gushed forth spontaneously at Bernadette’s touch?

Though the poor child’s errand had been a distasteful one, it entered, as we have already remarked, into the designs of her, whom every one beneath their breath spoke of as “Our Lady,» to make use of Bernadette’s weakness and humiliation to inaugurate the miracles which were destined to be worked at the Grotto. Her hand it was that had opened the way to the sacred spring, whose waters were to bring healing to the body; her word was to conjure from the rock the sanctuary wherein souls were to be brought back to life by prayer, penance, and the Holy Eucharist. The redeeming graces which were to be showered upon the world from the heights of Massabielle might already be foreseen.

Fifteenth Apparition

(Thursday, March 4th)

On the morning of March the 3d, Bernadette prayed fervently at the Grotto, but manifested no

¹Estrade—“Souvenirs Intimes d’un Témoin.”

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signs of ecstasy. The following day was the last of the fortnight, and it was generally hoped that the event would be marked by some striking prodigy. More than 20.000 persons had congregated to witness the child's ecstasy and to hear from her lips the will of the mysterious Lady who was pleased to appear to her; perhaps even to learn the Lady's name, for up to the present she had not divulged it.

The troops were called out for the occasion by the local authorities, the mayor, deputy mayor, and superintendent of police, all three wearing their tricolour sashes, maintained public order and involuntarily added to the solemnity of the proceedings.

Bernadette had no sooner emerged from her miserable home in the Rue des Petits-Fossés than she found herself preceded by two gendarmes with drawn swords, whose mission it was to open up a passage for her and protect her from the eagerness of the crowd. In all simplicity and modesty, her mind already occupied with thoughts of the Lady, she passed through their midst unembarrassed and "entirely natural, because of her communion with the supernatural."

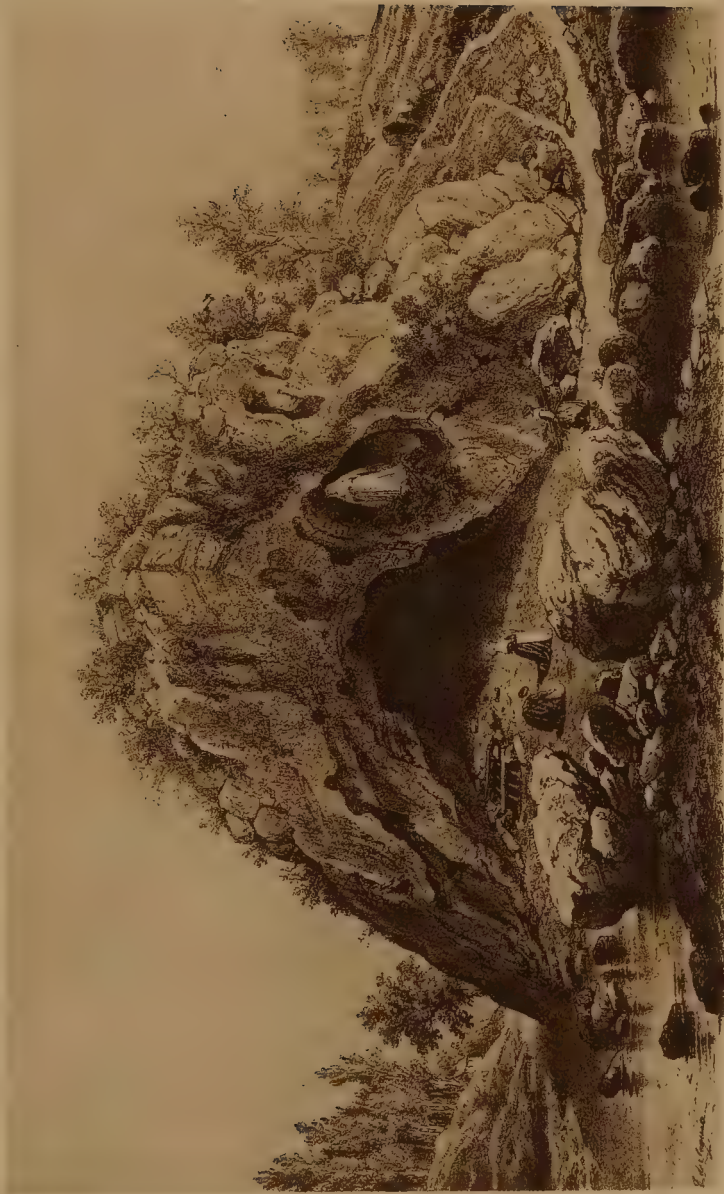
The moment she commenced her prayer every voice was hushed, every knee bent, emotion filled every heart.

The inner drama moved on quickly; the ecstasy lasted almost an hour. The child's face reflected at one moment intense happiness, "the ravished attitude of Saint Theresa communing with Heaven"; at another, desolation to the point of tears.

What formed the matter of this secret colloquy between the Blessed Virgin and her favourite child?

It has remained a secret. Doubtless Our Lady was preparing her little messenger to bear testimony in the face of opposition and suffering; for to manifest herself thus to the child was to give her a glimpse of

The Grotto of the Apparitions in 1858 with the autograph of Bernadette.



progress to France Lourdes Bernadette Soubirous

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heaven from which she was to gather strength, energy, and consolation.

Bernadette came to herself without anything miraculous having occurred in the Grotto beyond the usual ecstasy. Many expectations were disappointed; but the Lady had disappeared as usual without saying farewell. She had only smiled as was her custom. It was not her intention to leave her work unfinished.

Sixteenth Apparition

(Thursday, March 25th)

The fortnight of apparitions was over, but Bernadette was in the habit of often returning to Massabielle and, when it was possible, of passing a happy hour in blissful recollection of the Vision which had so often charmed her soul. A rustic altar, flowers, lights, and prayers had meanwhile transformed the Grotto into a sanctuary, whilst offerings were already accumulating in view of the chapel which was to be built.

An interval of three weeks had passed. It was the eve of March 25th. Many pious souls felt a secret attraction impelling them to turn their steps on the morrow towards the Grotto in celebration of Our Lady's festival; we can fancy what force this attraction exercised on Bernadette's heart!

She recognised the sweet intimate yet insistent call of her "mysterious Visitant" when she wished to enter into communication with her, and Bernadette's own desires hastened the hour which would find her kneeling at the Lady's feet.

That evening in the family circle the child gave vent to her joy and hope for the morrow. She passed a sleepless night, happy though wakeful.

The Ave which her lips incessantly repeated were sweet to the ear of the Divine Mother, who had in store for her child on the day following a manifesta-

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tion more radiant than all that had preceded it. So impatient was her affection that she was first at the meeting place. When Bernadette arrived at the Grotto she found her waiting, peaceful, smiling, and radiant.

The child's first impulse was to ask the Lady's pardon for being late. The reply was reassuring, and, forthwith, Bernadette entered upon an hour of celestial rapture. Never had the Heavenly Lady shown herself so tender and so encouraging; in consequence the child emboldened, and remembering that the Lady had not yet divulged her name, prayed her twice to do so, saying: "Madame, would you be kind enough to tell me who you are?" The only reply was a smile, but a smile of such indulgence that Bernadette repeated her request for the third time and with still more insistence. Thereupon the Lady, who remained standing above the rose tree, changed her expression, "her face became suddenly serious and she seemed to take an attitude of humility."

She joined her hands, raised them to her breast, looked up to heaven; then, slowly opening her hands and leaning forwards over the child, pronounced these words:

"Que soy era Immaculado Counceptiou!"

"I am the Immaculate Conception!"

Then, without a farewell glance or word, she vanished, "leaving Bernadette her image and her name."

The mystery of the Grotto was revealed. The little shepherdess had heard the name "which the Blessed Virgin bore in the secret counsels of the Most High before she was born, and before she was called Mary."

Pius IX in defining that "Mary was conceived without sin" had placed upon her brow the loftiest of diadems. Mary in return comes to announce to the whole earth that the definition of her Son's Vicar is

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the truth inscribed from all eternity, thereby crowning the august Pontiff with the diadem of *infallibility*.

When we reflect that it was to an innocent shepherdess, amidst the solitude of the Pyrénées, that she chose to divulge her name, and address her momentous announcement, we are tempted to exclaim with the author of the following lines:

“Hail beloved native mountains! Nay, although ye be not in France the first in loftiness or renown; in sanctity ye are all-surpassing; for eighteen times have ye been trodden by the virginal foot of the Queen of Time and Eternity.”

In spite of all, Bernadette remained in ignorance of the signification of the word which she had just heard, and in order not to forget it on her way to communicate it to the Curé—who this time was destined to confess himself vanquished—she repeated incessantly all the way: “*Que soy era Immaculado Counceptiou!*”—“I am the Immaculate Conception!”

The Curé, however, was alive to its significance, as were also the faithful; a torrent of devout enthusiasm swept the city. The sacred rock and the branches of the wild-rose bush were regarded as holy relics and kissed with love and awe. No doubt remained! It was really and truly she, whose name was pronounced on all sides with bated breath, who had appeared, the Queen of Heaven, Mary, full of grace!

Seventeenth Apparition

(Wednesday, April 7th)

On March 25th the Blessed Virgin had come to declare her name to the world. On the 7th of April she was to seal that name with a miracle. The morning of that day found Bernadette in contemplation and prayer. Absorbed in the ecstasy, a lighted candle

1 Canon Rousseil “Les Splendeurs de Lourdes.”

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in her right hand, she approached her left hand so that the flame passed between the fingers of the latter. "She is burning herself!" cried those who were around her. Bernadette remained unmoved. Doctor Dozous, who in accordance with the designs of Divine Providence was a witness of this prodigy, forbade the extinction of the flame, which was fanned by a strong draught.

This lasted for a quarter of an hour; not only had Bernadette felt no pain, but her hand showed no trace of burning. The ecstasy over, the Doctor desired to repeat the experiment. "He placed the flame of the candle several times under the child's left hand, whereupon she drew it away quickly, crying: "You are burning me."¹

Such was the impression left upon the onlookers by the last Apparition which they were destined to witness. Bernadette was to behold the Blessed Virgin once again—but almost in solitude—and to draw from this final vision strength to support the trials to come. The moment of struggle was at hand, and it will soon be our duty to trace its vicissitudes.

Eighteenth Apparition

(Friday, July 16th)

Three months later, on the 3rd of June, Feast of Corpus Christi, the little favourite of Our Lady had the privilege of receiving for the first time the Body of Our Lord in the Chapel of the Hospice. "Bernadette made her first communion yesterday," wrote the Curé of Lourdes to the Bishop of Tarbes the following day. "She seemed penetrated with the importance of the holy rite. During the children's retreat, her demeanour, piety, and attention left nothing to be desired. She is developing in a surprising man-

¹Docteur Dozous—La Grotte de Lourdes, sa fontaine, ses guérisons.

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ner." It was innocence itself drawing near to partake of the Bread of Angels, and the spotlessness of her soul became yet whiter by contact with uncreated purity. Upon being asked which had given her the greatest pleasure, to receive Our Lord, or to converse with the Blessed Virgin at the Grotto, Bernadette replied: "How can I say? the two things go together; no comparison is possible between them. What I do know is that I was very happy on both occasions."²

On July 16th, Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, she had received Our Lord for the third time, and towards the end of the day—a day devoted to Jesus in the Holy Eucharist and to His Blessed Mother—she heard within her the well-known summons which stirred her heart to its depths. Rising from her knees she called her Aunt Lucile and hurried to the celestial meeting place. Entrance to the Grotto was forbidden by the authorities, and a wooden boarding closed in the front. Bernadette and her aunt were therefore obliged to cross to the further bank of the Gave and to kneel down opposite the Rock of the Apparitions. It was evening, just when the Angelus was about to sound from the parish belfry. Suddenly the child started and cried: "*There she is! There she is! She is saluting us! She is smiling upon us across the boarding!*" The barriers had quickly melted away before Bernadette's ardent gaze, and she saw only the Mother of God in her ineffable goodness. Once more the child's soul was plunged into the depths of ecstasy and love. No farewell was spoken, the mother's reluctant heart chose to be silent rather than to give her favourite pain; nought passed but a glance and a smile, so full of tenderness that Bernadette declared she had never seen their like. Bernadette was never again to see this glance and smile except in the glory of heaven.

²Estrade—"Souvenirs Intimes d'un Témoin."

III

MARY'S WITNESS

LOURDES was destined to become a focus of faith and mercy; thousands of souls were to flock thither to increase their piety, to borrow new energy and resolution. Suffering and charity were to join hands under the eyes of the Divine Mother. Miracles were to be never-ceasing.

At Lourdes was to be experienced "the blessed contagion of fervent devotion which bursts forth in prayer and song, those moments of burning faith and enthusiasm whose afterglow last as long as life itself. The smile of welcome, the pleading voice, the outstretched arms of Lourdes were to thrill the mind of the nineteenth century and touch its heart."¹

Such were to be the achievements of the Queen of Heaven in the domain of her choice where she had willed to reveal herself; but alas! no great work is made perfect without suffering. The little Shepherdess of Bartres had tasted the infinite joy of contact with things divine; another contact—divine also—that of the Cross, was destined to fructify the work which had been begun, and prepare the way for greater triumphs. We shall see her face to face with the united forces of a prejudiced and bureaucratic administration, of materialistic scientists with their denial of the supernatural; face to face with the ecclesiastical authorities rigidly and wisely seeking for light amidst conflicting testimonies. The hand of the Immaculate Virgin will be plainly apparent in the moral courage developed by Bernadette the more so

¹L'Abbé Bertrin—"Histoire critique de Lourdes,"

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as this—*her witness*—was naturally feeble and humanly incapable of sustaining the struggle.

Bernadette Before the civil authorities and the medical faculty

We have already seen how on Sunday, February 21st, the “Procureur Impérial” and the Superintendent of Police summoned Bernadette before them and endeavoured, first by persuasion, and then, failing in that, by threats, to induce her not to return to the Grotto.

The “Procureur Impérial” concluded his examination with the following caution:

“Your behaviour at the Grotto is a positive scandal; you are a disturber of the peace, and the whole thing must be put an end to: Will you promise me not to return to Massabielle?”

“No, Sir, I cannot promise that.”

“Is this your final decision?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Enough! you may go, we will see what is to be done.»¹

“My poor mother was in tears,” writes Bernadette in her private notes, “and her sobs were heart-rending when she learnt that they were likely to put us in prison. I did my best to console her, saying, What is the use of crying because they are going to put us in prison when you know we have done no harm to anyone.”

The Superintendent, Monsieur Jacomet, an intelligent, cultured and popular official, was possessed of a rare faculty for extracting avowals from the culprits with whom he had to deal and for ferreting out the slightest clue. He well knew how to exercise persuasion in certain cases, and, if this failed, to fall back

¹Estrade—“Souvenirs Intimes d’un Témoin.”

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upon threats. We will allow Bernadette to tell the story in her own words: "Upon the first Sunday in the fortnight, as I was coming out of church a policeman caught me by the cloak and told me to follow him. I did as I was bidden and on the way I was told that I was going to be shown the inside of the prison. I listened in silence and so reached the Superintendent's office. He had me brought into a room where we were alone,¹ gave me a chair and I sat down. Then taking a sheet of paper he bade me relate everything that had happened at the Grotto. This I did. After having written several lines in accordance with my dictation, he began to interpose things which were foreign to me.² Finally he started to read over the statement, to see—as he said—that he had made no mistakes. I listened attentively. No sooner had he read a line or two which were inexact than I interrupted him immediately—'No, Sir, I never said that.' He worked himself into a rage, insisting that I had, whilst I continued to affirm that I had not. The dispute lasted some minutes. Seeing that I persisted in repeating that he had made a mistake, and that I had said nothing of the kind, he dropped the point for the moment and continued his reading, only to repeat the same stratagem at intervals for an hour or an hour and a half."³

Bernadette does not speak of her father's arrival, but we know that he came during the course of the examination to claim his child. Jacomet, an astute official, was well aware that people of his class are almost always timid and apprehensive, and dread above all things any trouble with the police. Jacomet turned his knowledge to account in order to intimi-

¹The Superintendent was alone when Bernadette arrived, but we know that M. Estrade entered shortly after and remained till the end of the examination. He relates the incident himself in his "*Souvenirs Intimes*."

²Meaning things which were inexactly stated.

³Extracts from Bernadette's private notes.

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date the child's father and persuade him that it was high time that he put an end to the comedy in which his daughter was figuring.

"I warn you," he added, "that if you have not sufficient authority to keep your daughter at home, I have sufficient to ensure her being kept out of mischief in another place."

The miller was only too alive to the significance of the threat; and promised to see to it that his daughter did not return to Massabielle. We have already seen how, the very next day, under the impulsion of a mysterious power, Bernadette was forced to return to the Grotto, thus setting aside the orders of the Superintendent.

The latter "came to the conclusion that the Soubious family were fooling him", and from that moment he commenced an inquisitory investigation with a view to discovering the motive of what he called a "design to defraud." Every movement was noted; endeavours were made to draw some compromising revelations from the youngest children; finally in order to exploi the goings and comings of the police, about the Soubious home in the Rue des Petits-Fossés, hint were dropped that the family were involved in some shady transaction. We may imagine their suffering, rendered none the less acute by the state of destitution to which they were actually reduced. But no murmur escaped them.

From the very commencement of the apparitions Bernadette's faith in the Vision had never wavered. It remained intact in spite of disappointments, in spite of days when her eyes sought in vain in the Grotto the unearthly radiance which the Heavenly Lady shed about her. The child seemed to communicate her confidence to those around her. Blessed household which even in its poverty had the happiness of suffering persecution for righteousness' sake!

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The Lady of the Grotto was ever present to instill courage into their hearts.

The ever-increasing concourse of spectators and the very divided condition of public opinion had determined the Superintendent of Police and the Mayor of Lourdes, Monsieur Lacadé, to notify the Prefect of Tarbes of the occurrences at Massabielle. The Minister of Public Worship, Monsieur Rouland, was also advised; but neither Prefect nor Minister took any interest at first what they considered "a story invented to excite popular curiosity." Little by little they were forced to interfere, owing to the wordy warfare waged in the press, "which was giving to the Apparitions of Lourdes the importance of a national event," and soon the authority of the Prefect was thrown into the opposition scale. The then Prefect, however, was a sincere and practical Christian, Baron Massy, who had been honoured by Pope Pius IX with the title of Commander of the Order of St. Gregory the Great. He started with the conviction that if the occurrences at the Grotto were not put an end to, they would result in encouraging a superstition dishonourable to the country and harmful to the cause of true religion. He considered it to be clearly his duty to prevent this double misfortune.

A very short investigation had sufficed to demonstrate the impossibility of sustaining the charge of fraud or interested motives either on the part of Bernadette or of her family. The Prefect was satisfied that the child's sincerity could not be brought into question; there remained the hypothesis of an hallucination. Accordingly, on the very eve of March 25th, he wrote to the Mayor of Lourdes requesting him to have a medical examination made as soon as possible into Bernadette's mental condition, with the view of ascertaining whether detention in an asylum might not be advisable.

Three doctors were chosen to conduct the examina-

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tion: two from Lourdes, the third from a neighbouring village. Doctor Dozous, who had adopted the supernatural solution as a result of his presence at the ecstasies, was purposely set aside. Nevertheless, it was unanimously recognised that the Doctors on whom the Mayor's choice had fallen were essentially men of honour; and, although prejudiced against the idea of any divine intervention in the occurrences at the Grotto, confidence was felt that their verdict would, at least, be a conscientious one.

They visited the School of the Hospice, and in presence of the Mother Superior subjected Bernadette to a lengthy examination. The child replied with her accustomed frankness and naiveté. Her narrative was marked by a lucidity and exactitude which could not help striking her examiners. They found it impossible to make her contradict herself.

She replied to all their questions with unfailing logic and common sense, but the supernatural being entirely out of their grasp their verdict was as follows, in its essential paragraphs:

"There is nothing to show that Bernadette wished to impose on the public; the child is of an impressionable character and may have been the victim of an hallucination. A gleam of light coming from the direction of the Grotto doubtless arrested her attention; her imagination, naturally predisposed in that direction, gave to that gleam of light a form striking to the childish imagination, that of the statue of the Blessed Virgin as it appears over the altar.

"Consequently we, the signatories, are of opinion that the girl Bernadette Soubirous may have fallen into a state of ecstasy, repeated on several occasions; that the phenomena of the apparitions are the effects of a moral derangement. Does this call for any special medical treatment? The complaint we think we are justified in attributing to Bernadette cannot in any way endanger the child's health. not at least so

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long as confined within its present limits. It is likely, on the contrary, that when Bernadette has resumed the ordinary routine of her daily life, she will cease thinking about the Grotto and the marvels she describes."

The Prefect was too intelligent not to grasp the contradictions so evident in the doctors' report. If the ray of light which was credited with having struck the girl's imagination had only shown itself once, how explain the power of its fascination, sufficing to throw her into ecstasy on no less than sixteen occasions? If, on the other hand, it was admitted that the imagined ray of light showed itself on the occasion of each ecstasy, how explain that she alone of all surrounding thousands was able to see it? Further, how many times had she not visited the Grotto between February 11th and March 25th without experiencing its seductive charm? One thing was evident, remarks Monsieur Estrade, namely that, if Bernadette was either mad or suffering from hallucination, she must be left to effect her own cure.

Nevertheless, we find about this time the Mayor of Lourdes, together with the "Procureur Impérial," announcing to the Curé Peyramale the Prefect's intention of having Bernadette Soubirous conveyed to Tarbes "to be treated medically." At this the worthy Curé could not restrain his indignation: "If," said he, "the Bishop, the clergy, and I, are waiting for a fuller light to be shed upon the occurrences at the Grotto before pronouncing upon their supernatural character, we at least are sufficiently informed to judge of Bernadette's sincerity and full possession of her mental faculties. Your own doctors can find no trace of any cerebral lesion; they dare affirm nothing and conclude their report with an hypothesis. I know my duty as Pastor of this parish and the protection I owe to my flock. Go and tell Monsieur Massy that his gendarmes will find me barring their way on

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the family threshold, that they will have to fell me, to pass over my body and trample it under foot, before they touch a hair of the child's head."¹

They were aware that the Curé would be as good as his word, and the Prefect concluding, as we have seen, that the doctors' report did not furnish him with sufficient grounds for putting the child under restraint, abandoned a measure which would have excited general indignation.

At a later date Doctor Balencie, one of the three medical men commissioned to enquire into Bernadette's mental condition, disavowed his report, saying that "it was not in accordance with scientific principles, and that no part of it could be sustained." He was never tired of praising her moral superiority and judgment. He attended her during the whole time she spent in the Hospital of Lourdes and eventually became one of her most ardent defenders. "He sat with us in after days," recounts Doctor Boissarie, "*on the Bureau of Constatations*"² and never lost an occasion of bearing testimony to her admirable qualities and in particular to her simplicity and good sense.

"No personality," adds Doctor Boissarie, "has ever been more studied and dissected. Is it possible that hallucination or mental derangement could have brought before her eyes as in a dream the image of the Virgin, or whispered in her ears those mysterious colloquies whose meaning she hardly understood!

"How could a child of fourteen, an ignorant shepherdess, without education or preparation for the rôle, impart to the world such grave and exalted precepts, raise herself to the height of the divine purpose, call

¹"Histoire de Lourdes," by Monsieur Lasserre.

²The permanent medical committee [at Lourdes] composed of physicians of all nationalities which examines patients prior to their entry into the *piscine* and certifies the miraculous cures that occur.

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all men to repentance, proclaim the little known dogma of the Immaculate Conception, and finally leave us an image of the ideal Virgin such as the greatest masters of art had not yet conceived!

“The rudimentary intelligence of the miller’s daughter could never, unaided, have risen to the height of such a rôle. A firm will proof against all wavering, a good cause and a definite end in view were necessary to enable her to suffer every sort of contradiction for more than twenty years. In order to fill the world with her message, she required strength from on high and divine light to illumine her soul.”¹

Let us cite the following passages from the Abbé Bertrin’s “*Histoire critique de Lourdes*,” which has been well termed, “human reason’s final word upon the occurrences at Massabielle, the authoritative summing up, in short, of the history of Lourdes.”²

“Bernadette was no dupe of an overheated imagination. To begin with, she was the least nervous of young girls and was in consequence the last person likely to fall a prey to illusions engendered by a diseased temperament. Moreover, her piety was never of an exaggerated type; she was even, from this point of view, a most improbable subject for religious hallucinations.

“She announces that she will have only a limited number of visions contrary to the universal practice in the case of patients suffering from hallucination. Whereas, hallucination is absolutely dependent upon the existence of certain fixed and habitual conditions necessary to its manifestation, Bernadette’s visions, on the contrary, are so entirely independent of and superior to the circumstances in which they occur that they are capable of existing in the absence of the

¹Doctor Boissarie—Œuvre de Lourdes.

²Mgr. Schoepfer.

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coincidence of these circumstances, and on some occasions of failing to exist when the coincidence is present.

“Again the dreams of hallucination are sterile; they teach nothing and reveal nothing, either to their subject or to the world. Bernadette, on the other hand, as a result of her visions, speaks of things of which she had no previous knowledge and describes a new type of Madonna, which she has never seen elsewhere, and whose beauty is the admiration and despair of the artist whose task it is to chisel it in marble.

“Let us call to mind the discovery of the miraculous spring in the course of one of the apparitions. It was impossible for Bernadette to know beforehand what nobody knew, namely, that a spring existed in the Grotto; nevertheless, in obedience to the Lady’s command, the child digs the ground with her fingers, the water begins to trickle timidly, and rapidly increasing in volume, become in the space of a day or two the farfamed spring that we admire at the present time. Let anyone produce a victim of hallucination who has ever accomplished a thing like this. Hallucination, far from increasing the mental powers to a point where they are capable of embracing the supernatural, on the contrary diminishes them. This is but a further proof of her real and actual existence given by the celestial Visitant to the onlooking crowds and to the whole world.

“There was another—not mental as before, but corporeal—sign wrought in the child’s living and virginal flesh. We allude to the extraordinary phenomenon witnessed in the course of the seventeenth apparition, where the flame of a candle was in contact with ‘Bernadette’s left hand for a quarter of an hour without burning her.’

“We do not simply affirm that Bernadette did not feel the flame, but, what is more, that the flame did not burn her. Certain nervous conditions may induce

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insensibility, but they are powerless to prevent the flesh from being consumed by a flame which touches and envelops it.

“Finally, prolonged and repeated hallucinations have a deteriorating effect on the moral character, and weaken the intelligence to the verge of madness.

“In Bernadette’s case, on the contrary, the visions produced a marked elevation of mind and character.”¹

We are now at liberty to trace with confidence the demeanour of the chosen witness of the Immaculate Virgin in face of the ecclesiastical authorities and of the world in general: but before doing so let us briefly describe the vexatious opposition aroused by the devotion of which the Grotto had become the centre.

The Prefect, failing in his attempt to put Bernadette under restraint, and thereby suppress the origin of the manifestations at the Grotto, endeavoured to put an end to the manifestations themselves. Having occasion to be at Lourdes himself on May 4th, in the course of his administrative functions, he convened the Mayors of the Canton and appealed to their “good sense, intelligence, and loyalty to restrain the fanatical throngs that flocked from all the neighbouring parishes towards Lourdes, and abandoned themselves to idolatrous practices and prostration at the Grotto.” These worthy functionaries turned a deaf ear to his eloquence and remained unmoved. Baron Massy understood the significance of their silent protest and sought other means of leading the populace back to what he denominated “sane ideas.”

A sort of altar had been established in the Grotto; pious souls had adorned it with statues and flowers. The Prefect went so far as to imagine that the removal of these objects would put an end to the devotion it-

¹L’Abbé Bertrin—“Histoire critique de Lourdes.”



Our Lady of Lourdes

"I am the Immaculate Conception"

(Words of the Blessed Virgin, to Bernadette March 25, 1858)



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self, and upon the pretext that public worship was being celebrated at Massabielle in defiance of the law, he directed the Superintendent of Police to clear the Grotto of all the objects of piety which had been placed there.

The news of this measure filled the little town with consternation. The use of every single vehicle, even the postmaster's trap, was denied to the Government!

A poor woman, "terrorised by threats of fines and prosecutions, consented to lend her cart and modest beast of burden." Amidst a storm of hisses the police carried out their unpleasant duty. It was announced at the same time that the objects removed from Massabielle and transported to the Town Hall would be restored to their several owners. All the women of the working class crowded immediately to claim their exvotos, and promptly reinstated them in the Grotto, where the same evening an illumination of the sacred rock was organised as a reparation for the insult offered to the Blessed Virgin.

Meanwhile the water of the spring was working miraculous cures. A quarry labourer of Lourdes, Louis Bouriette by name, had already completely recovered his sight by contact with the still muddy water. He was well known to have lost one of his eyes in the explosion of a mine.

Another person, Croisine Duconte, had had sufficient faith to plunge her child, who was at the point of death, into the icy waters of the spring. All the bystanders were astonished and aghast; every effort was made to prevent her from accomplishing this deed of sublime confidence. She never hesitated a moment, and her child was healed.

The incredulous began by denying these miracles. "We no longer live," they said, "in the days when the blind saw and the deaf heard. Time has shorn the supernatural of its force, or rather the cessation of

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miracles coinciding with the dawn of modern science, is sufficient proof that all the marvels of bygone ages were the product of pious hallucination, itself the daughter of ignorance."

As if to give the lie to these blasphemous sarcasms, miracles were multiplied at the Grotto. Freethinkers could no longer keep their eyes shut; but their denial of the supernatural did not exhaust their resources. Sudden cures are effected, it is true; but it must be because the spring has mineral virtues superior to those of the other Pyrénéan waters! And a chemist was found, Monsieur Latour of Trie, who affirmed, after analysis, that, "in view of its general composition and of the chemical values of its constituents, medical science would *perhaps* shortly recognise its possession of special curative virtues sufficient to class it amongst the various waters forming the mineral wealth of the department."

It is easy to imagine the shouts of triumph which issued from the ranks of those whose hope it was to ruin the faith of the multitude. Their triumph was founded on a—"perhaps"—and was destined to be of short duration. It was sufficient, however, to give Baron Massy a new basis on which to recommence his crusade against "superstition." Remembering that all sources of mineral water are subject to State control, he was within his right, pending the decision of a superior authority, in forbidding the public utilisation of the waters of Massabielle. He accordingly framed a regulation by which it was forbidden to take water from the new spring or to pass over the common lands known as the Massabielle bank. He further proceeded to close the entry to the Grotto with a plank boarding to cut off all access, and to set up posts bearing the warning: "Entry to this property forbidden."

These proceedings were too antagonistic to popular opinion not to be received with cries of indignation.

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The defenders of the Madonna rose in arms, and it is touching to find the earliest champions of Our Lady in the brave quarry labourers, horny-handed and obstinate, whose ideas seem to borrow from the rocks amongst which they toil a measure of their strength and resistance; proud-hearted, if you will—their boast is to be no man's slave—but good at bottom.

On three separate occasions they affirmed their right of entry to the Grotto by a touching protest. From the Pont Vieux, where they mustered, to Massabielle their deep and resonant voices swelled forth in the Litany of Our Lady, with its plaintive "*Ora pro nobis*," caught and repeated a hundredfold by the echoes of the Pyrénées. This protest seemed to pass unheeded; it was necessary to emphasise it, and no less than twice the boardings and even the sign-posts were torn down and thrown into the Gave, without the police, who were on the watch, being able to put their hands upon the *culprits*.

The Prefect renewed his orders that every precaution should be taken to prevent a fresh attempt and that prosecutions should be instituted if necessary, and in the meanwhile new planks had been put up. The only effect of his action was to still further excite popular feeling.

"The police," cried the quarrymen, "may as well count their limbs: before long they will have to fish for them in the Gave as they had to do for the planks."¹

The Prefecture had military force at its command; this consideration was not sufficient to stop them. But their Pastor intervened. From the pulpit he announced that, "if there were men who persisted in their intention of dishonouring their town by blood-

¹Estrade—"Souvenirs Intimes d'un Témoin."

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shed, they would find him at the Grotto in place of the police, and they would have to trample him under foot before having their way." The same author adds: "These fierce mountaineers, who would not have feared to face a regiment under arms, had not the courage to disobey the injunctions of their beloved Pastor." After Mass they took the opportunity of clasping in their own toilworn palms the hand of the priest, whom they regarded as a father, and of whom they were justly proud. Thenceforth it was as believers and not as law-breakers that they went to the Grotto.

Who would have credited it? The wives of these brave quarrymen proved more tenacious than their husbands and were of opinion that the latter's surrender should have been conditional, and that they should have exacted in exchange, if not the right to use the water of the spring, at any rate the right to pray at the Grotto. They now came forward to continue the struggle.

One of the Mayor's subordinates named Collet was deputed to mount guard over the Grotto, and it was not long before the women with their native shrewdness discovered the weak point in his armour. His duties as *patrol* were a trifle monotonous: a touch of gossip might afford him a little distraction without harming anyone. These worthy dames had grasped the situation. Whilst some of their number engaged him in a friendly chat, the rest were devoutly telling their beads at the Grotto; then when they had finished, the latter charitably took their comrades' places. The easy-going custodian had no idea that he was being duped.

His diligence, moreover, was not stimulated by any hostile sentiment: according to rumour "he took care to arrive very early at the Grotto, and sure not to be remarked by indiscreet eyes, he admitted himself within the forbidden enclosure, where he said his

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prayers at his leisure in silence and pious recollection.”¹

The Superintendent of Police, who had private sources of information, put him on his guard against the women’s artifices; the result was a shower of summonses. When they came up for hearing the Justice’s Court was as attractive as a circus. The culprits took the whole proceedings as an excellent joke. When asked their names, they would content themselves with giving their nicknames, or pretending not to understand the Judge’s questions would reply with a feigned simplicity which put him beside himself.

“Is it true,” asked the Judge, “that you broke into the Grotto by infraction (*à l’aide d’effractions*)?”—“By fractions!” was the reply,—“Oh! your honour, I am no scholar, and if I used *fractions* it was quite unknowingly.”

“You are an idiot!” retorted the Judge. “I am asking you whether you got into the Grotto by breaking the planks of the boarding.”

“I! certainly not, Lord preserve us! We poor women don’t do like quarrymen.”

“Such was,” according to Monsieur Estrade, “the habitual tone of the proceedings and they generally terminated in roars of laughter.”²

But there came a day when the names of two illustrious trespassers appeared on Collet’s charge-book. The wife of Admiral Bruat, governess of the Prince Impérial, and Louis Veuillot, editor in chief of the wellknown newspaper the “*Univers*,” were the offenders.

Great was the perplexity of the Superintendent of Police and no less that of the Mayor and even the Prefect. Either proceedings must be taken in both cases, or no summonses must any longer be issued.

¹L’Abbé Bertrin—“*Histoire critique de Lourdes*.”

²Estrade—“*Souvenirs Intimes d’un Témoin*.”

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The question appeared so weighty with consequences that it was finally referred to the Minister of Public Worship, and awaiting his decision the day of prosecutions was over.

Not entirely, however; for the "Procureur Impérial," having been informed that certain persons in the town were circulating a rumour that the Emperor and Empress intended making a pilgrimage to the Grotto, was so little alive to the ridicule he was likely to incur, that he ordered the arrest of three good women, supposed to be responsible for its propagation, upon the charge of insult to the Imperial Family.

As the local tribunal declined to pronounce the condemnations which the "Procureur" desired, the case was transferred in appeal to Pau, where at the very opening of the hearing it was announced, "that the Crown did not propose to press the matter further." This decision was greeted with thunderous applause and cries of "Long Live Our Lady of the Grotto."

The city of Pau offered an ovation to the acquitted women, who regained their homes in triumph "with laurels in their hands."

Whilst these first believers were accepting persecution in defence of Our Blessed Lady, a demand for a new analysis of the water of the spring arose from all sides. The believers in miracles desired it, convinced that the supernatural hypothesis could only be confirmed thereby. The non-believers readily consented, being equally certain that the result would put an end to superstition and raise Lourdes to the coveted rank of a thermal resort.

In the end, the town council of Lourdes entrusted the analysis to Monsieur Filhol, one of the best-known chemists in the south of France, a member of the Faculty of Science at the University of Toulouse, who had already made a study of most of the mineral springs in the Pyrénées.

Whilst waiting for Science to pronounce its verdict,

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both sides were visibly uneasy, the silence observed by common consent was a sufficient proof of this.

The suspense seemed interminable; finally it was announced that the expert's report was at hand; its conclusion was as follows:

"The water of the Grotto of Lourdes may be considered from its composition as of a nature suitable for drinking purposes, and similar to that of the majority of springs found in mountains whose soil is rich in limestone.

"It contains no active substance capable of giving it any definite therapeutic properties; it may be drunk without danger.

"Toulouse, August 7th, 1858.

"Signed: FILHOL."

The disgust of the anti-supernaturalists may be imagined! Humiliated by their defeat, but unwilling to confess themselves beaten, they continued to oppose idle controversy to argument. The Prefect went so far as to maintain the restrictions to the approach to the Grotto, in virtue of his original contention that it was being transformed into a place of worship, without legal authorisation. The public, however, indignant at his arbitrary proceedings and the tutelage which he imposed on them, complained to Napoleon III, who happened at that moment to be near by at Biarritz.

The Emperor caused telegraphic instructions to be sent to the Prefect, directing him to remove the barriers at the Grotto immediately, and to meddle no further in the business.

Mary had only permitted these varied forms of opposition in order the better to show that the work was hers. Her purpose was to take possession of Massabielle in broad daylight, like a victorious queen coming to claim her throne in the midst of her people—a throne founded on love and mercy. In sovereign

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clemency she would call to her feet those who had been her earliest and bitterest apponents. Many in time to come would be seen on their knees in the Grotto reciting their rosary and astonished "that having eyes to see, they saw not," at the time of Our Lady's transcendent manifestations.

The "Procureur Impérial," who had gone so far as to allow himself to pose as a persecutor, observed later on: "We were fighting in good faith for the honour of religion and in an ordinary human affair we should have succeeded. That we did not—I no longer hesitate to recognise the fact—was because you had the Blessed Virgin with you and against us."¹

Moreover, the Prefect, the Mayor, the Superintendent of Police, in short all the officials who, with Monsieur Dutour, had declared themselves resolutely opposed to the manifestations at Massabielle, felt—through Mary's intervention—the smile of divine pity bless their soul: all died with the Crucifix pressed to their lips.

Oh, mighty! Oh, all embracing Heart of Our Divine Mother! Thou wert incapable of leaving to expire in darkness any of those whose name history had coupled with thine own! We recognise therein thine unspeakable love; we thank and venerate thee!

Bernadette Before the Ecclesiastical Authorities.

We have seen the reception given to Bernadette by the Abbé Peyramale. Her humility and ignorance prevented her from being troubled by the rebuff; but he himself, in spite of his reserve and prudence, felt strangely moved and disturbed in his mind by the series of manifestations occurring at the Grotto. He considered it his duty to go and lay the matter before his Bishop.

¹Estrade—"Souvenirs Intimes d'un Témoin."

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Mgr. Laurence "was by nature unemotional, deliberate, and practical; his acts as well as his decisions invariably bore the stamp of singular perspicacity."¹

He recognised that Bishops bearing rule over the Church have special responsibilities of which they owe account to God and to their flock; that any move on their part should never be taken without long and ripe reflection, especially when questions of a supernatural order are concerned. In the case of Lourdes more than ordinary caution was required, for the spirit of falsehood, seeking any and every means to ruin the work of the Immaculate Virgin, had had recourse to diabolic artifice. Women and children saw visions at the Grotto. Strange phenomena were observed; but in every case the effect produced was either ridiculous or terrifying, and the eye witnesses, comparing these mountebank affairs with Bernadette's ecstasies, had little trouble in concluding that the latter alone were of celestial origin. Satan had deceived himself and only caused the truth to triumph.

The Church, in the person of the Bishop, was biding her time. On all sides controversy was rife. Many with the miracles of the Grotto before their eyes were already enthusiastic partisans of the cause, and had made up their minds. According to these, there was no doubt that the Queen of Heaven had appeared, and apart from the miracles, they pointed, as a proof, to the great religious movement which in Lourdes and the surrounding country had resulted in the conversion of sinner and the growth of piety.

Others, less impulsive, but inclined, nevertheless, to recognise a divine intervention in the manifestations at Massabielle, refrained from pronouncing judgment: they awaited the verdict of the Church, ready to give in their submission.

¹Estrade—"Souvenirs Intimes d'un Témoin."

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The anti-supernaturalists, on their side, denied God's right to work miracles, and, in calling for the Bishop's pronouncement, they hoped that his insight would detect superstition where they themselves were proud of having exposed it.

The episcopal authority gave them their head, convinced that if they fought against God, they would labour in vain. Mgr. Laurance confined himself to observing the course of events.

After having watched and prayed for the space of six months, seeing that all the efforts of the opponents of the Grotto were defeated by a superior power, and that numerous miracles had contributed to enlighten and confirm the faith of believers, he made his first official utterance on the 28th of July, 1858. A commission of investigation was constituted. Its mission was to obtain light and information by means of thorough discussion and detailed research. It was composed of priests as distinguished for their learning as for their character and their virtues; they were, nevertheless, expressly recommended by the Bishop "to call to their assistance men skilled in the sciences of medicine, physics, chemistry, geology, etc., and to neglect no means whatever of arriving at the truth no matter what it might be."

The Commission was not averse to profit by "the test of time." Three months passed before the investigation was actually commenced. Four entire years were not considered too much to devote to the elucidation of the truth.

On November 17th, 1858, Bernadette appeared for the first time before the Commission. She told the tale of the Apparitions with all her natural candour and simplicity, which in themselves pleaded strongly for the truth of her narrative. Ignorant child as she was, she spoke of the occurrences at the Grotto with a lucidity and a precision which vouched for her entire sincerity. To all objections she replied with

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a prudence and circumspection which denoted a supernatural aid. The words of the Vision were faithfully repeated, its movements reproduced and finally the irresistible conclusion was come to that she had really and truly seen the Mother of God. When, at the last plenary session of the Commission, in presence of Mgr. Laurence, "she repeated the story of the Apparition of March 25th, reproducing the Lady's gesture and attitude at the moment when she said—'I am the Immaculate Conception'—tears ran down the aged Bishop's cheeks," so vivid was his emotion.

The Commission visited the Grotto with Bernadette, who on the spot repeated the various episodes of the Apparitions, and indicated the spot which the Lady had pointed out when telling her to go and drink at the fountain, as also the place she was in the habit of occupying when the Vision appeared to her. This identification facilitated a subsequent investigation into the origin of the spring, as also into the theory of the famous luminous ray adopted by the physicians who had in the first place reported on Bernadette's mental condition. As regards the cures worked by the water of the spring, all the evidence was submitted to a medical collaborator, the celebrated Doctor Vergez of the Faculty of Medicine of Montpellier, and his opinion as to the miraculous nature of the facts left no room for doubt.

"This eminent authority was profoundly impressed by the investigation which, so far as he was concerned, was entirely novel. Never in his whole career had he met with anything similar. With his mature competence he came to the conclusion that, in these phenomena, a contingent force superior to those of nature, and foreign to the water, which only served as its medium, was clearly manifest."¹

The enquiry lasted, as we have already remarked,

¹Monsieur l'Abbé Bertrin—"Histoire critique de Lourdes."

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no less than four years, evidence was duly weighed and prayers for guidance offered; the moment came for truth to emerge victorious and to dictate the episcopal verdict. January 18th, 1862, saw the publication of a pastoral by the Bishop of Tarbes conveying to the faithful of his diocese, his judgment upon the Apparitions of Lourdes. Mgr. Laurence, "after having set forth at length, in so lucid and forcible a manner as to admit of no response, the arguments upon which his judgment was based," concluded in the following terms:

"We declare that Mary, the Immaculate Mother of God, did in reality appear to Bernadette Soubirous on February 11th, 1858, and on certain subsequent occasions, to the number of eighteen in all, in the Grotto of Massabielle, near the town of Lourdes; that this Apparition bears every mark of truth, and that the faithful are justified in believing it certain."

This judgment produced an immense sensation and the religious press published it far and wide. A few anti-Catholic papers, unable to confound the Bishop's logic, took refuge in ridicule: Christian souls were confirmed in their faith: the Church's decision brought them security and joy.

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**Mary's witness by her personal character,
humility, disinterestedness and piety.**

Long before this a divine current had set in bringing souls to Lourdes. "It had become," so it was said, "the 'rendezvous' of Heaven and Earth."¹ Multitudes knelt before the sacred rock, become a second Mount Tabor, around which many were later to come and pitch their tents. Over all these prostrate throngs the

¹"Annales de N.-D. de Lourdes," 2d year.

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smile of the pure and spotless Madonna seemed to hover. The pilgrims delighted to question eye witnesses of the Apparitions and to snatch a pebble or a blade of grass as relics, to such a point that, if the truth must be told, nothing remained of the wild-rose tree upon which Mary had stood, as a result of the constant repetition of these pious but regrettable depredations. But the pilgrim's chief ambition, after visiting the Grotto, was to set eyes on her upon whom the Immaculate Virgin had let fall a ray of her heart.

Bernadette, like other children of her condition in life, had left the Sisters of Nevers' school as soon as she had made her first communion; needless to say, her stock of book-learning was not a heavy burden. For the next two years she was no longer to be found in the squalid dwelling of the Rue des Petits-Fossés but in a mill hidden in the depths of a ravine at the foot of the Fort. All the visitors to Lourdes thronged thither to see her, to hear her speak, and to question her. She herself, always the same, simple and undisturbed, in spite of the torture of her asthma, repeated to one and all the wonders of the Grotto.

Her accents carried such conviction, her words were so concise, luminous and appropriate, her answers to impromptu objections so swift and shrewd, the influence of the supernatural so evident in all she said, that all but the most prejudiced, upon leaving her, were already won to the cause of the Madonna of Massabielle, convinced that Heaven was speaking by the mouth of the humble child.

The Virgin Apostle fathomed the mystery of the eternal generation of the Son of God; he proclaimed it to the world and became the "*Evangelist of the made flesh.*"

Bernadette heard from the lips of the spotless Virgin the announcement of the unique prerogative which constitutes one of her highest glories; she pro-

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claimed it at Lourdes, whence the sound of it went out unto the ends of the earth : she became, in her turn, the *Evangelist of the Immaculate Conception*.

One of the episodes of the Apparitions, that of the 25th of March, was particularly striking as reproduced by Bernadette.

Monsieur Fabisch, the celebrated sculptor of Lyons, who had accepted the commission to perpetuate in marble the Vision whose beauty had ravished her, wrote: "I have never seen anything more thrilling than her attitude, when I asked her to show me the Blessed Virgin's expression at the moment when she exclaimed: "I am the Immaculate Conception." She rose with the most perfect artlessness, joined her hands together and looked up to heaven. Not even Fra Angelico, Pérugino or Raphael have ever imagined anything as ethereal and at the same time as fathomless as the gaze of this unsophisticated girl. As long as I live I shall remember her enraptured mien.

"I am familiar with the masterpieces of the greatest painters in Italy and other countries, who have sought to depict the transports of divine love and ecstasy; in none of them have I found such un-earthliness and angelic bliss. Whenever I asked Bernadette to assume this pose, the same expression would transfigure, illumine and glorify her features, so that involuntarily my eyes filled with tears."

The sculptor's emotion at the sight of this countenance, embodying an ideal which he strove vainly to attain, was shared by all those who were privileged to see her, and who left exclaiming: "There can be no doubt that she reproduces what she has actually seen; her gestures are borrowed from heaven and not from earth."

As we have already remarked, Bernadette remained two years with her family. At times friends would take her to Pau, Bagnères or Cauterets, where

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strangers delighted to question her. The Curé Peyramale could not help seeing a serious danger for the child in these excursions. Acting in concurrence with the Mayor of Lourdes, Monsieur Lacadé, he asked the Superior of the Hospital of Lourdes¹ if she would be willing to receive her. She and her community esteemed it a favour to shelter under their roof Mary's privileged child; but they never allowed her to divine their feelings. Visitors from all countries, France, Spain, Italy, etc., thronged to see her there, as they had done in her own home. They arrived in almost uninterrupted succession, to such a point that on certain days she had hardly a moment's respite. Mindful of her mission, and, in spite of her frequent sufferings, she submitted to their interminable questionings for the sake of her Heavenly Mother.

When face to face with wilful incredulity she never stooped to argue: "I tell you what I saw and what I heard," she would say; "if you do not choose to believe me, what more can I do?" or again: "I am commissioned to tell you these things, but not to make you believe them"; and then would remain silent. But generally—if not always—her visitors took leave of her with a new light in their souls and an increased love for the Immaculate Virgin in their hearts.

Bernadette was the Witness of Mary also by her humility: amidst the enthusiasm of crowds, sought for and venerated as a saint, she never departed from the modesty, candour and simplicity of the little shepherdess of Bartrès. She was constantly handed medals and rosaries to touch, and some went so far

¹In this connection it is well to explain that the "Hospice" or Town Hospital of Lourdes, was confided to the care of the Sisters of Nevers, who, in addition to the hospital proper, devoted to the sick, carried on under the same roof a day school for the children of the poor, attended by Bernadette as a child, and a boarding school for children of the better class, where most of the young ladies of Lourdes and the neighbourhood received their education.

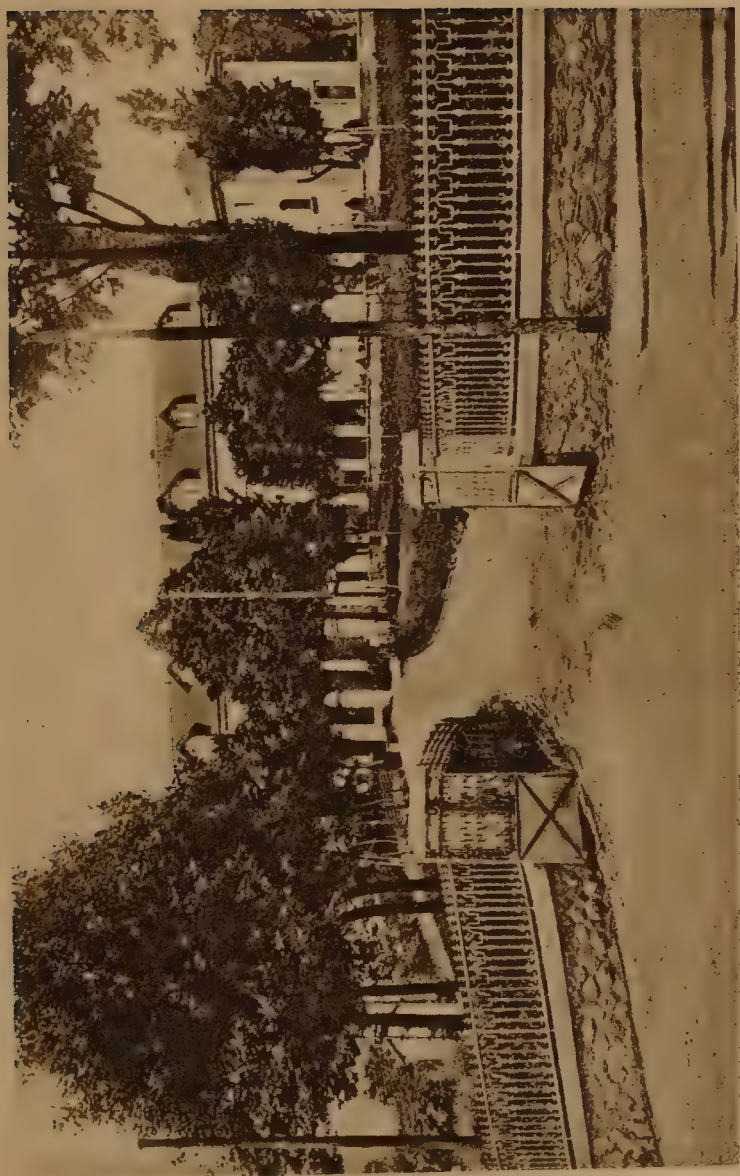
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as to ask for her blessing. To a priest, who insisted on kneeling before her, she replied: "It is your place to give the blessing, Monsieur l'Abbé, and not mine." To a worthy woman, who was similarly insistent, she said: "Get up; you see I have no stole. How can I bless you?"

Often visitors arrived when she was in the midst of a game, sometimes persons of note. She would go and speak to them of the mysteries of Our Lady's love, then rejoin her playmates as naturally as if she had seen no one, without ever speaking of what she had said or heard. The Queen of Heaven by looking upon her seemed to have clothed her in an invulnerable cuirass: her virginal soul was inaccessible to any feeling of personal satisfaction. Her humility was so strongly evident that incredulous visitors, who came from curiosity or to please their friends, were suddenly converted into firm believers. Of the number was a Protestant Judge, an eminent legal authority, who as the result of a religious controversy, wherein he had refused to admit defeat, came to see her. He listened to her with the deepest interest. Little by little emotion got the better of him and he left in tears, saying to the priest who had accompanied him: "It is impossible to contest or to explain by natural means the cures attributed to the water of the Grotto. To my mind, the strongest argument lies under this roof. This child astonishes and disarms me. I cannot help feeling that there is something in it."¹

But if Bernadette's humility was a witness to the Immaculate Virgin, what shall we say of her *disinterestedness*? We have already seen how extreme was the poverty of herself and her family; this poverty was the glory of the child and of her mission. Every means was tried to alleviate this indigence by the

¹"Annales de N.-D. de Lourdes," 2d year.



*Municipal Hospital of Lourdes
(now called Hospital of Bernadette)*

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introduction of a little comfort. Often in taking leave of her, visitors whose natural delicacy had taught them how to bestow alms discreetly, would slip a gold piece or two into her hand or the pocket of her apron. She would give them back at once. "It seemed as if the money burnt her fingers," said the Sisters who knew her at that time.

At her home visitors would often, as if by accident, drop an offering on the mantel or elsewhere; all their ingenuity was in vain, for her parents, learning heroism from their child, followed her example: they would immediately restore the money to the would-be giver, and this when often as not the cupboard was bare.

One of her brothers relates the following incident: "Four strangers, two ladies and two gentlemen, arrived one day to see Bernadette and afterwards asked me to show them the way to the Grotto. I went with them carrying a can, which they had brought with them, and which I filled at the miraculous spring. For my trouble they gave me a two-franc piece,¹ which I bore triumphantly back to my mother, thinking that it would be more than welcome, as at that time we were in absolute want. Bernadette pounced on the money and obliged me to give it back. I had no desire to do so, and in order to decide me she boxed my ears soundly, whereupon I yielded much against my will. By reluctance to disgorge I had aroused her suspicions, and when I returned home she went through my pockets to assure herself that I had not brought back the offending coin. At the same time she gave me forcibly to understand that in the future I was to accept nothing from anybody."

Thus the heroine of the Grotto, poor and humble as before, exercised a mysterious influence, shedding around her an atmosphere of light and love which

¹The equivalent of 40 cents American money.

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“made the divine reality of the Apparitions sensible.” Mary’s witness could in her turn sing her “*Magnificat*”: the *Immaculate Virgin* had wrought great things in her “because she had regarded the humility of her handmaid.”

After having followed Bernadette in her public mission, it is time to give a glimpse of her in her daily life and surroundings. In raising her to her intimacy, Mary had left her personality intact. Bernadette remained as before a simple, artless and candid child, so innocent that at fourteen years of age she was as ignorant of evil as an infant in its cradle. Human learning was equally a closed book to her, for at the moment of the Apparitions she could neither read nor write. Nevertheless, it is a mistake to describe her as of limited intelligence, without individuality or depth, and of little scope outside the supernatural standpoint of the Apparitions.

Such were not the characteristics of her whom the Blessed Virgin had chosen for her confidante, and her action on an ignorant and timid child was sufficiently marvellous to justify us in affirming the natural gifts with which God had endowed Bernadette alongside the gifts of grace which were conferred upon her.

She had little memory, and had never cultivated it. She sometimes said, “You would have less difficulty in driving the book into my head than in trying to make me remember the lesson”; but, with all that, she was not devoid of intelligence.

When, after the Apparitions, she was for the second time confided to the Sisters of Nevers, the Superior put her to study with the boarders. This arrangement lasted for one or two years, and even so, a great part of her time was occupied with attendance on visitors.

It is, nevertheless, astonishing to see the letters she wrote during this period. The spelling, doubtless,

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shows a lapse here and there,¹ and the turns of expression are hardly in accordance with the purest genius of the language; but, apart from this, what good sense, judgment of character, and affectionate, spiritual heart,—all clothed in a language of charming simplicity.

Her native soil had endowed her with a gift of ready repartee, often seasoned with a touch of humour, for Bernadette possessed innate wit. As we all know, it is a treasure which cannot be acquired, for, as the saying runs, "the wit we strive to acquire, spoils that which we already have." "She has always a retort on the tip of her tongue," wrote the Sisters, "but never an unkindly one."

Like all the children of the mountainside, she was of a very decided character. All her life her chief characteristic was tenacity in her ideas. "I have always been obstinate," she said at a later period of her life, "and the Blessed Virgin punished me for it by making me ask her name three times." On one occasion at Lourdes she insisted, momentarily at least, on going to see her family, but finally yielded to the reasons given her for deferring the visit until another day. Such was this child, of whom her father could nevertheless assert that she had never disobeyed him. Grace—not nature—transformed her into one of those truly submissive ones of whom it is written: "The obedient soul shall speak of victory."

Bernadette was lively and gay and not at all averse to a joke. One day the silence of the class-room was broken by a sneeze; a second and a third followed until all the class seemed to be in the grip of a universal cold in the head. The stealthy smiles exchanged between the pupils proved that there was little cause for anxiety, but the mystery remained to be elucidated, as it very rapidly was. Bernadette prov-

¹We will spare the reader a reproduction of these in the extracts we may have occasion to make.

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ed to be the culprit; the doctor had prescribed the use of snuff for her asthma, and she had allowed all her fellow-pupils to dip into the box, whence this sudden epidemic.

Whilst at Lourdes her piety did not seem at all out of the common, so it was said. If we understand by piety exalted reflections on the mysteries of the life of Our Lord or the great truths of the Faith, doubtless it was not. The child herself often said: "I never can make a meditation"; but, on the other hand, she loved prayer and it had a strong attraction for her. She was often to be found in the chapel saying her rosary, and who shall say what ardent love her angelic soul put into every one of the Aves with which she delighted to crown her Heavenly Mother!

She was often known at night, when suffering from one of her attacks of asthma, to refuse a cordial which would have given her relief, but would have deprived her of the privilege of union with Our Lord in Holy Communion on the following day. Love of the Blessed Eucharist was alive in her heart, and if the child was unconscious of her intimate union with Jesus, her simplicity never dreaming of it, we can hardly doubt that the luminous aureole around her head, of which the Curé Peyramale had a fleeting glimpse when she approached the Holy Table, was an outward sign of its existence. The words of the Holy Gospel are as true as ever: "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God."

Moreover, the Divine Master found her already in sufficiently close union with Himself to be associated with Him in His sufferings. One Good Friday Bernadette was united in a very extraordinary manner to the passion of Our Lord, by a very severe pain in the left shoulder, of which no trace remained on the following day.¹

¹One of the Sisters vouches for this—she was a witness of it.



*The Grotto in 1926
and
The Church built in response to the
Message of the Blessed Virgin through Bernadette*

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The Superior of the Hospice, Mother Alexandrine Roques, suffering from a very severe sprain, was ordered six weeks' entire rest by her doctors. She called for Bernadette and said: "I have no time to lie in bed. Go and ask the Blessed Virgin to cure me immediately." She did as she was told and the next morning the Superior was on her feet again to the great astonishment of the doctors.

Bernadette herself had a severe inflammation of the lungs whilst at Lourdes; her state was so critical that she received the Last Sacraments. At the moment when she was apparently about to draw her last breath she suddenly asked to be given some of the water from the Grotto to drink, and no sooner had she done so than she found herself completely cured. In her own words: "I felt as if a mountain had been lifted off my chest."

The statue of the Madonna had been carved in a magnificent block of white Carrara marble. It was at last ready,² and the sculptor, Monsieur Fabisch, who before commencing work had said to Bernadette: "I shall be satisfied with nothing short of your saying, on seeing it—It is she," submitted it for her approval. The child viewed with admiration the noble creation of his genius; then added under her breath: "It is very beautiful, but it is not she. . . . Ah! no. The difference is as wide as between earth and heaven." Nevertheless, the sculptor had realised an ideal of delicate etherealism; it was not his fault if Bernadette had been admitted to a glimpse of that beauty which human eyes cannot see, nor human hearts comprehend.

The blessing of this statue was the first ceremony to take place on the scene of the Apparitions. On

²The statue was the gift of two sisters, The Misses Lacour, whose residence was at Montluzin (Commune de Chasselay, Rhône). In memory of Bernadette they left their estate to the Congregation "des Sœurs de la Charité de Nevers," with charge to visit and assist the poor of the parish.

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April 4th, 1864, a great gathering of the clergy and many thousands of pilgrims assembled at the Grotto with the Bishop in their midst.

"It was the first priestly utterance amid the rocks which had been mute witnesses to the words of the Immaculate Virgin."

The sacred orator, drawing his inspiration from the vernal greenery of the landscape and the sanctity of the occasion, called upon the voices of nature to greet and hymn the praises of the well-beloved, the all-fair, who was come to abide in the cleft of the rock. Each heart felt its own emotion voiced when he continued: "It seems to us as if she were still present and visible to us as she was to Bernadette. Our piety evokes her and brings her vividly before us as we gaze upon her image carved in spotless marble by the inspired chisel of a truly Christian artist. At its feet thrilled multitudes shall fall on their knees and count their prayers already satisfied with a glimpse of this touching and beautiful creation, the statue of Our Lady of Lourdes, symbolising the great drama of the Apparitions, as witnessed by our beloved Sister, Bernadette Soubirous."¹

Bernadette was not present; neither was the Curé Mgr. Peyramale. Illness prevented their attendance, and it was only by their sufferings that they were able to unite themselves in spirit with this glorious demonstration. Their souls were of those which are always submissive to the will of God and ready to sacrifice themselves for His glory.

The Immaculate Virgin had said to Bernadette: "Go and tell the priests that I wish a chapel to be built here." As soon as the words had been recognised as proceeding from the Mother of God, their fulfilment became the most sacred of duties, and Mgr. Laurence, in a pastoral letter, wrote: "In conformity with the

¹"Annales de N. D. de Lourdes," 2d year.

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Blessed Virgin's desire, several times expressed in the course of the Apparitions, we propose to erect a sanctuary on the site of the Grotto.

"The Prelate whom Our Lady had chosen to be the master builder of her Holy Tabernacle conceived a plan worthy of her whose inspiration it was.

"He decided to leave the Grotto exactly as it had been hallowed to future generations by the pageant of the Apparitions; exactly as it was when Mary by her presence transformed it into a glorious sanctuary; free and open to earth and heaven; in uninterrupted enjoyment of the solemn spaces of the atmosphere, the blue firmament, the sun in his daily progress, the Gave in its murmurous flow, the meadows and the hills, the far off woods, and the distant horizon, reserving the summit of the rock for the triumphant throne of the Immaculate Conception and the Sanctuary to be raised in its honour."²

The colossal undertaking was commenced forthwith and pushed forward with all the ardour that loving children display in the fulfilment of a mother's wishes. Massabielle underwent a complete transformation: its primeval rock-mass was to become the pedestal of Our Lady's shrine. The whole surroundings of the sacred Grotto began to wear a new aspect; so that in the words of a pious Bishop: "At the feet of the Immaculate Virgin reigned a universal charm, a festive atmosphere, and, as it were, the approving smile of Heaven."

The crypt of the new church was blessed for divine service on May 21st, 1866. Thousands of pilgrims thronged to the solemnity. "No sooner did anyone arrive in the town than he found himself already in an atmosphere of rejoicing. Triumphal arches spanned the main streets; the houses disappeared beneath masses of garlands and trophies; on every

²Ibid.

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side the eye encountered inscriptions in honour of Mary."

The cortege formed in the parish church, and an endless procession wound its way to the Grotto, to the accompaniment of choirs posted at intervals along the route. The Bishop appeared on the heights preceded by the Canons. An immense crowd followed him and surrounded the Grotto on all sides, covered the rocks above, and filled every inch of space available.

Pontifical High Mass was sung at an altar facing the statue of the Grotto. At the elevation the silence of the multitude was impressive; the only sound was the murmur of the Gave on its rocky bed. It was the supreme moment of a supreme solemnity, a moment comparable to that of the Apparitions. The Son of Mary came down to the spot that His Mother's feet had trod; He came at her bidding. It was for Him that the Virgin had desired a sanctuary. He was about to take possession of it and make it His dwelling-place; and in doing so He bore eternal witness to His Mother's prerogative. Jesus Christ, Himself a pilgrim like themselves for that day, descended for the first time in their midst, in order to honour His most Holy Mother and give the Grotto His divine consecration. In the depths of the Holy Mysteries the Pontiff affixed the seal of the Precious Blood to the work of Mary. The people were silent and adoring; soon the moment was to come for them to render more explicit homage.

After the consummation of the Holy Sacrifice, a priest explained the reason for the glory rendered to the Immaculate Virgin, on that day and in that spot; but, a thunderstorm having rapidly gathered, his discourse was cut short, and the preacher called upon the multitude to raise its united voice as a substitute for his own ineffectual efforts. The suppressed enthusiasm of every heart found its vent and a for-

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midable acclamation resounded of: "Vive Notre Dame de Lourdes!"

The priest acclaimed Pius IX the Pope of the Immaculate Conception, which was heartily echoed. He asked that, in justice, honour should be rendered to those whom Mary had chosen for her tools, and the gathering responded with cries of: "Long live the Bishop! Long live the Curé of Lourdes!"¹

"Bernadette, the seed whence this glorious harvest of piety had sprung," humble as was her wont, was hidden away amongst the Children of Mary of the Parish; but there was a universal desire to see her, to touch her, to embrace her, to have some object belonging to her: to such a point that her veil was torn in pieces by devout hands. The Sisters were forced to mount guard around her, so they related subsequently, as but for this precaution her clothing would have been carried away piece-meal. "The Saint! There's the Saint!" was the cry on all sides.

The same evening, as a climax to this memorable day, the town was illuminated. The crowd with one accord flocked to the Hospice in search of Bernadette.

The gates were closed, but the besiegers swarmed over the walls and railings, determined to catch a glimpse of her. In order to pacify the concourse of pilgrims, the Sisters were obliged to let Bernadette walk up and down the courtyard, surrounded by themselves, and guarded by a military picket, who had considerable difficulty in maintaining order.

The poor child was greatly distressed, her humility suffered keenly and she vainly tried to avoid this ovation, during the course of which she exclaimed: "You are exhibiting me like a wild beast."²

Bernadette's public mission received its crown that day. "The child of February 11th, 1858, had seen

¹ "Annales de N. D. de Lourdes," 2d year.

² Extract from the narrative composed by the Sisters of the Hospital at Lourdes, who were contemporaries of Bernadette.

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with her own eyes the Bishop at the altar close to the spot where she first fell upon her knees in the Grotto.

She had heard the voice of the people crying aloud the name of the mysterious Lady who had then been still unknown to her; she was free at last to disappear, "and follow the interior voice which called her to the solitude of the cloister."

In 1863 Mgr. Forcade, Bishop of Nevers, in a private interview which he had with her, questioned her as to her vocation. The child admitted that it was her desire to remain permanently with the Sisters of Nevers; but, said she, "ignorant and poor as I am, and without aptitude for any particular work, I can hardly hope to become their sister in religion."

Avoiding anything which might weigh upon her decision, the Bishop contented himself with replying that "in certain circumstances it was possible to relax the rules." He recommended meditation and prayer, and in the month of August, 1864, Bernadette expressed definitely to Mother Alexandrine Roques, Superior at Lourdes, her desire to be received into her Congregation. "Mother," said she, "I have decided to become a nun, and if your Reverend Mother Superior will accept me, it will be a joy to me to become a Sister of Nevers."

The state of her health kept her nearly two years longer at Lourdes; but, during this period, she followed the rule of the community as if she were a nun; also aiding to nurse the sick, towards whom she was drawn by a peculiar attraction.

On April 28th, 1866, she wrote to a former religious of the Hospital at Lourdes, at that time Superior of a community in the South. "I thank you for the fervent prayers which you are good enough to offer to Our Lord for me. I believe they have already been heard, for I feel more eager than ever to leave the world, and have now quite made up my mind. I hope to leave here shortly. Oh! dear Mother, how I

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long for the great day when I shall have the happiness of entering the Novitiate, for it must be nothing less than a heaven upon earth. I beg you, then, dear Mother, to redouble your prayers to this end."

On her side, Mother Alexandrine Roques wrote on May 1st, following, to the same Superior: "Bernadette is delighted to think that she will shortly be strong enough to go to Nevers. It is her one desire, as she has lately written to the Novice Mistress, who has already replied, reassuring her as to any fears she may entertain. So she is overflowing with joy and longing for the moment of departure. I fear it may yet be put off if the Bishop of Tarbes insists on her remaining a little longer for the good of the Grotto. Pray God, dear Mother, that this may not happen, if such be His holy will, so that the poor child may be sheltered from the peril of self-esteem, and from the advances of certain religious orders, which make overtures to her, even in our presence. These only fill her with aversion and a stronger desire to become one of us, although we have never done anything to influence her decision."

On July 4th, 1866, Bernadette tore herself away from Lourdes, from her family, and from "the Grotto which constituted her heaven upon earth"; and set out for Nevers, where she was destined to find that other terrestrial Paradise which the religious life provides.

In that atmosphere the flower of the Immaculate Virgin was to burst into full blossom and yield its choicest perfumes.

NEVERS
PART SECOND

NEVERS

I

CONGREGATION OF THE SISTERS OF CHARITY AND OF CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTION OF NEVERS

Bernadette's Novitiate as Sister Marie-Bernard

TOWARDS the end of the seventeenth century there lived at Saint-Saulge in the Nivernais province a Benedictine monk, Dom Jean-Baptiste de Laveyne. He was of those whom God singles out for His work, whom His love endows with treasures of indomitable energy, and who exercises a fruitful apostleship of souls, as much by the splendour of their virtues as by the persuasive power of their word.

Inspired by the light of divine wisdom, Dom de Laveyne conceived the design of founding an Institute of religious devoted to the two-fold duty of caring for the poor and of teaching the young. The Lord sent him his two first subjects in the persons of two young maidens, Marie de Marchangy and Anne Le Geay, to whom he became spiritual director. Together with rich natural gifts and treasures of grace, they had but a single ambition, to glorify God at the price of every sacrifice. Dom de Laveyne made Our Lord's will known to them and gladly they turned their back on all earthly joys. In 1680, we see them beginning their novitiate in a modest habitation, and two years later they give themselves irrevocably to God by the vows of the religious life, thereby laying the foundation of the Institute, whose pattern Heaven had revealed to its pious founder in the spiritual retirement which

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prepares the way for the accomplishment of all the great works of God.

Saint-Saulx was the cradle of the new Congregation; but as early as 1685 the Mother-House was removed to Nevers, which has ever since remained the centre of the Order.¹

It was not long before other chosen souls, seeking perfection, and obedient to the call of God, came to swell its ranks, and, as they were destined "to find their Carmel in the midst of the distractions inseparable from a life of active service," their founder taught them to cultivate, in the first place, the interior life which was to be their strength and security.

Five entire years were employed in the building up of souls in sanctity, and the preparation of disciples to propagate the true spirit of the Institute in the various houses which they founded throughout France.

In 1690, the Congregation of Sisters of Charity and Christian Instruction of Nevers, though only in the tenth year of its existence, was already firmly established. The divine purpose as revealed to its founder had already been realised: this was an intimate union of exterior service and interior life, of action and contemplation. One of the first Mothers of the Institute, Marcelline Pauper, in the midst of her labours, whilst occupied in caring for the poor and sick and giving instruction to ignorant women and young girls, was raised to the dignity of a crucified spouse of Jesus Crucified. Bearing upon her body the sacred stigmata, she was, further, the recipient of such special grace and favours as are reserved for Christ's most privileged souls. Her daily prayer became an ecstasy, her Heavenly Spouse desiring to make it

¹The Mother-House was first lodged in the Place St. Pierre (now Place Guy-Coquille) and from there transferred to the Rue de la Parcheminerie. After the Revolution it occupied a building in the Rue S. Martin known by the name of Ste Marie. In 1856, it was finally installed in the Rue St. Gildard.

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manifest that there is nothing in the active life incompatible with the highest sanctity. In the midst of her apostolic journeyings, Marcelline, whose mortifications were so severe that she wore out her discipline on her virginal flesh, rejoiced at finding herself surrounded by the heretics of the Cevennes, at Bourg-St.-Andéol, where she was engaged in seeking out and assisting the poor of the countryside. She believed herself to be on the point of receiving the crown of martyrdom, but Jesus-Christ shielded her from the sword that "she might continue her perpetual martyrdom of daily self-sacrifice, and so increase her reward.

"To mark His approval of the new Institute, God was pleased to bear striking witness to the sanctity of His faithful servants and their influence with Him. In midmost France, Marcelline Pauper was visibly invested with the power of working miracles. The touch of her virginal hands and her prayers sufficed to heal the sick, even such as were despaired of and given over by their physicians and surgeons. In the north of the Kingdom, the Superior General of the Congregation, Marie Scholastique de Marchangy, shared this privilege and power with her."¹

The tree planted by Dom de Laveyne gradually extended its branches over a great portion of France, but its sap remained vigorous as ever. Though the tempest came, it remained unshaken.

During the Revolution the history of the Institute formed a thrilling page, from which future generations were to learn a lesson of devotion, sacrifice, and heroism carried to the point of martyrdom. The Sisters were cast into prison; some of their number were already on the fatal tumbril which was to bear them to the foot of the scaffold, when the fall of

¹"Coup d'œil historique sur la Congrégation des Sœurs de la Charité de Nevers," by Père Bouix, S.J.

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Robespierre deprived them of the privilege of shedding their blood for God and the salvation of their native land. Of them it may be said as of the Beloved Disciple: "Though martyrdom escaped them, they sought no escape from martyrdom."

Most of the hospitals where they tended the sick were closed, their poor were in danger of perishing from hunger, and deprived of the consolations of religion, but the Sisters never abandoned them; they begged for them their daily bread; watched at the bedside of the suffering; dressed their wounds, and lifted up their hearts to God in the hour of death, pressing the crucifix to their lips and pointing out to them the way to heaven. In face of such courage the Terrorists themselves were seized with an involuntary feeling of respect.

"The Mother-House at Nevers owed an example to the others. It numbered at this time twenty-eight religious. They were summoned in the name of the Republic to deny their faith and take the sacrilegious oath prescribed by law: "Never!" they cried. "We will sooner die."

"Upon this courageous reply, they were in a body thrown into a dungeon, where their only food a morsel of bad bread. But in their captivity and in the midst of the greatest privations, their souls were flooded with the consolations vouchsafed to the martyrs of the Early Church. Jesus-Christ Himself was in the midst of this faithful company of virgins, and the prison-house was to them an anticipation of heaven. Before long, however, the boat-men of the Loire, the populace and the poor, raised a cry of: 'Give us back our Sisters!' The Directory yielded, and they were led back in triumph to their convent.

"The Divine Master had permitted the deliverance of His faithful servants in bondage, for His sake, for He desired to make use of these virgins, who had been witnesses to His Name and confessors of the Faith, to

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revive in France a Congregation which had grown dearer than ever to His Heart, and to cause it to blossom anew when the storm was over.

"No sooner did a ray of liberty dawn upon the persecuted Church than they commenced their task. They inaugurated their Institute for the second time and God was pleased to bless it, as its inception. Many souls flocked to share the consecrated life of these religious who had so gloriously battled for the faith.

"Formed in such a school they imbibed, and in their turn transmitted to their successors the primitive spirit of the Institute in all its vigour."¹

Thus during the course of the nineteenth century the Congregation extended its activities all over France.

"Love," says a mystic writer, "demands valiant and vigorous arms, hands never idle, whether clasped in prayer or opened to bestow alms, knowing how to pour in oil for the healing of wounds and wine for the comforting of the body; hands quickened by sympathy, alive with intelligence and skill."

The daughters of Dom de Laveyne are vowed to the realisation of this ideal. They pass their days and sometimes their nights in the hospitals nursing the sick; they dress the most loathsome wounds; they bring a smile and peace of heart to those unfortunates whose moral distress is often greater than their physical.

Who can measure the fruitfulness of this humble apostleship hidden away from public view in the wards of a hospital! Who can fathom its sublimity, nay, we will go further and say—its Divinity—for is it not God Himself whom the Sister of Charity serves in the person of His poor!

¹Extrait du "Coup d'œil historique sur la Congrégation des Sœurs de Nevers," by Père Marcel Bouix, S. J.

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And it is not only in the hospitals that they exercise it; they seek out the poor under the mean roofs where their misery finds a refuge; they visit, tend and succour them. According to the mind of their venerated founder, they were to neglect no work of mercy which they might undertake without offence to propriety.

To the apostleship of Charity the Daughters of Dom de Laveyne join that of "Teaching," which surpasses all others in importance. It is indeed the most exalted of all missions, forming as it does the continuation of that of Our Lord, who "hath appeared to all men instructing us."¹

According to Cardinal Pie, it is a kind of "priesthood."

The Sisters of Nevers exercise it in varied spheres: orphanages, Catholic clubs and work-rooms, elementary and boarding-schools.²

In vain are the various Houses sundered one from another by the mountains or the sea,—“the family tie” is one of the characteristics of the Institute; its members know neither distance nor solitude; they live in unison. They constitute in all reality “a living and active unit in the bosom of the great Catholic entity: internally they are one, externally they have all in common.”

Such was the religious Congregation to which the Immaculate Virgin was about to confide her favourite child. At the time of Bernadette's entry into the Novitiate, the Institute was governed by the Reverend Mother Josephine Imbert, who was distinguished by her elevation of mind, her remarkable wisdom and uncommon energy, which enabled her to fulfil her duties in the midst of incessant sufferings, her win-

¹Epistle of St. Paul to Titus ii. ii.

²The educational work of the Congregation has now been transferred abroad to England, Belgium, Spain, Italy, Japan and Africa, Switzerland, more than a hundred establishments having been closed in France since 1903 in accordance with the ignoble laws of 1901 and 1904.

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ning qualities, her great, strong and tender heart. It has been recorded of her "that she was one of the most highly endowed Superiors that Heaven had vouchsafed to the Institute."

Bernadette arrived at Nevers at ten o'clock on the night of July 7th, 1866, accompanied by the Superior of the Hospital of Lourdes. We read in the records of the Novitiate the following notice of the event: "At last our desires are fulfilled! Bernadette is one of us! How our hearts, filled as they are with pious devotion to Mary, have longed to claim for their own this privileged child of the Grotto of Lourdes! She is exactly as common report has described her: humble in the midst of her triumph, simple and modest, though everything up to the present has been calculated to excite her pride and force her into publicity; smiling and quietly happy in spite of the disease which for years past has been slowly undermining her frail and delicate constitution. Therein we recognise the seal of sanctity: the suffering which invariably accompanies celestial favours."

On an early day after her arrival the Mother General requested Bernadette to tell the story of the Apparitions in the presence of the entire Community and the Novitiate. She described with the utmost simplicity the garb, attitude, features, and words of the Celestial Visitant, reproducing with charming grace and freedom from affectation the Lady's gestures. "After the lapse of forty years," say those who had the privilege of being present on this occasion, "it is impossible to recall without emotion the beauty of her expression and her thrilling accents as she repeated the words of the Blessed Virgin: *"I am the Immaculate Conception."*

The transfiguration of her features whilst she related the Apparition of March 25th produced a deep effect on the religious, as it had never failed to do on the numberless visitors to Lourdes, and they would

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have desired a frequent repetition of the scene, breathing, as it did, an atmosphere of heaven. Nevertheless, as a safeguard to the child's humility, the novices and postulants were thenceforth forbidden to speak to her of the extraordinary favours she had received from the Blessed Virgin. One and all obeyed implicitly, and Bernadette herself never let fall another word on the subject of the Apparitions.

"One must have but a slight acquaintance with human nature, and especially with feminine instincts," writes Mgr. Forcade, "to be able to regard this reticence as without significance. I have no scruple in describing it as nothing less than heroic, and in giving Bernadette and her fellow-novices credit for it as such.

"Imagine, for a moment, on the one side Bernadette, fresh from Lourdes, where she had been the recipient of heavenly communications; on the other, more than a hundred young people, thrilled by the celebrity of her name, in daily contact and intercourse with her for a whole year, without once betraying by a word—one single word—their intense interest in a subject which naturally occupied their imaginations, minds and hearts to overflowing! Without resorting to a supernatural explanation of such a phenomenon, we may at least recognise that no higher testimony could be borne to the Novitiate of the Sisters of Nevers."¹

A few days after her arrival at the Mother-House Bernadette wrote as follows to the Sisters of Lourdes:

"Let me tell you all about our journey: we reached Bordeaux on Wednesday evening at six o'clock and stayed there till one o'clock on Friday. Believe me, we made the best use of our time there in getting

¹"Notice sur Sœur Marie-Bernard Soubirous," by Mgr Forcade, Bishop of Nevers, subsequently Archbishop of Aix, where he died, a martyr to his charity, whilst bearing the consolations of religion to the cholera-stricken.

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about, and in a carriage, if you please! We were taken to visit all the religious Houses. Allow me to inform you that they in no wise resemble that of Lourdes, especially the Institution Imperiale.¹ It is more like a palace than a religious house. We also visited the Carmelite church; from there we went to see the shipping on the river Garonne; we also visited the 'Jardin des Plantes,' where we saw something quite new; guess what? . . . Fish of all colours, red, black, white and grey; what astonished me most was to see them swimming about, regardless of a crowd of little urchins who were watching them.

"On Friday we passed the night at Perigueux and the following day started at ten in the morning, reaching Nevers at half-past ten the same night. I must confess that Léontine² and I had a good cry all day Sunday. The good Sisters cheered us by saying that it was one of the marks of a true vocation.

"I assure you that it would now be a much greater sacrifice to be obliged to leave our beloved Novitiate; one feels that it is God's house, and cannot do other than love it. Everything tends to increase one's affection for it, especially the instructions of our dear Mistress; every word of hers goes straight to one's heart. I never cease thanking Our Lord, however inadequately, for all the mercies with which He does not cease to overwhelm me."

The then Mistress of Novices, Mother Marie-Thérèse Vauzou, a great and heroic soul of superior intelligence, brought to bear upon the important mis-

¹The "Institution Impériale," now "Institution Nationale," has in fact the appearance of a palace. It is under the control of the Minister of the Interior. The deaf-mute inmates, at the moment of writing, number 230. Means have been discovered to enable them to enjoy the society of their fellow-creatures; they are taught to (hear with their eyes, that is, to decipher spoken words from the movement of the speaker's lips), and to speak intelligently themselves in the ordinary way.

²A postulant who arrived at Nevers at the same time as Bernadette.

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sion confided to her by God, her two ruling passions, love of Christ and love of souls. Her exquisite and delicate tact in forming those under her direction, she owed, we may say without exaggeration, to the possession in her own soul of a spark of the infinite tenderness of the Divine Master.

Humility, mortification, self-sacrifice, such were the foundations on which she sought to build up her religious life; all her efforts were directed to this end.

The Novices gladly opened their souls to her teaching, and lent themselves willingly to the process of crucifixion and at the same time of sanctification, which its observance entailed, because it was illumined by love. "In God, as in man, love is light"; and Mother Marie-Thérèse knew how to find within her heart, at need, burning accents to uplift them, tear them from earthly things, force them to enter upon the upward path and finally cast them into the loving heart of Jesus.

The postulant who knocked at the door of the Novitiate on July 7th, 1866, brought as a dowry to the Congregation of her choice her special election by God as an instrument for the glorification of His name, the treasures of grace with which the Apparitions of the Immaculate Virgin had filled her heart, and a name already inscribed in the history of the Church, graved during her own lifetime in the Book of Life, venerated and beloved by all the nations of the earth. Mary had herself been her first Novice-Mistress, and it was Mother Marie-Thérèse whom she had chosen to continue her work; what a privilege, what a grace!

The Novice-Mistress was alive to her responsibilities; a treasure had been confided to her, and with her unerring tact she recognised that immersion in the hidden life, silence, humiliation, and mortifications of every nature were the necessary safeguards of Bernadette's vocation. Her fellow-novices, even

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the most fervent, were impressed by Bernadette's^{*} humility, which emerged victorious from every trial, and was always calm and serene in the face of every sacrifice.

Must we admit the fact? Mother Marie-Thérèse, whose experienced eye was accustomed to read the hearts of her children as an open book, was never able to fathom the wealth of supernatural activity hidden in this novice's soul. This may have been due either to the natural timidity which rendered her relations with her Mistress less confidential, or, as is suggested by another writer¹ to the fact that the Blessed Virgin "in imparting to her the three secrets had reserved to herself the interior government of her soul." Mother Marie-Thérèse, had it been given to her to divine them, would have been enraptured by the intimate and habitual union with God, the love of suffering, the entire self-abandonment to the Divine Will, which characterised the interior life of this privileged child of the Queen of Heaven.

That all this should have escaped, even partially, a person so experienced in the guidance of souls, would be a mystery, did we not detect therein the merciful love of Our Lord, occupied in the fashioning of His little servant.

The atmosphere of the Novitiate, impregnated with prayer, sacrifice and love, was the very element suited to the development of the young aspirant's spiritual life. If at times her heart was bruised to bleeding, her soul expanded as in its native air.

Bernadette received the religious habit on July 29th, the Feast of Saint Martha, about three weeks after her arrival at Nevers.

The duration of her postulancy was thus curtailed, either because the years she had passed at the Hospital at Lourdes were considered a sufficient pro-

¹Père Marcel Bouix, S.J.

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bation, or because the high esteem in which she was held by her Superiors, inclined them to make an exception in her favour. She received the name of Sister Marie-Bernard. The Bishop of Nevers presided at the ceremony.

By permission of Divine Providence, two distinguished servants of God and His Church, Mgr. de Mérode¹ and Count Lafond,² were, almost as if by accident, present on the occasion. Both were animated by an equal ardour, devotion, and generosity towards all holy causes.

"I had the happiness of being clothed" writes a fellow-novice, "at the same time as Sister Marie-Bernard. I was impressed with the manner in which she made her retreat. What detachment! She was visibly lost in God! Nothing around her was capable of distracting her attention. My heart was deeply stirred, and it seemed to me that even to look at her was to grow in grace."

Once clothed in the livery of Christ, she withdrew still deeper into the hidden recesses of her soul: "*I came here to hide myself*," said she, and her fellow-novices were unanimous in testifying that she seemed, indeed, to have but one ambition: to be forgotten, to be reckoned as naught.

Each of her companions in her own way extolled her perfect regularity, simplicity, obedience, and charity.

"There emanated from her person an indefinable charm which inclined the heart to God. I never ap-

¹Mgr. de Mérode, Chaplain to His Holiness Pope Pius IX and Minister for Military Affairs in the Pontifical Government, 1860-1865, Archbishop of Melitene *in partibus*, 1866.

²An eminent Catholic of Nevers, entirely devoted to the Holy See. Author of a work: "Rome. Lettres d'un Pèlerin," of which Monsieur Auguste Nicolas writes as follows: "Your eloquence lends to the great name of Rome a thousand intonations, and wakes to life a thousand echoes, all unconflicting, because harmonised by the perfect concord of a Frenchman's heart and a Christian's piety."

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proached her without feeling myself nearer to Our Lord," wrote one of them.

"Her face resplendant with a supernatural light, her eyes in whose depths shone the reflection of heaven left an indelible impression on my mind. The mere remembrance of them raises me nearer to God," writes another. And a third: "I only remained three months in the Novitiate after Bernadette's arrival; I never saw her do or say anything which was not a subject for edification; I love her, invoke her, and regard her as a saint."

But why multiply testimonies? Their burden is invariably the same; they bear witness to a virtue which seemed to manifest itself without effort, so natural and lovable did it appear!

Sister Marie-Bernard had, moreover, preserved the simplicity and childlike ways which, if I may dare to say so, seem to constitute the garment of innocence. "*Is skipping allowed in the Novitiate?*" she asked soon after her arrival. "No, but we manage to amuse ourselves thoroughly all the same in recreation time." "Ah! I asked because I love turning the rope for the others to skip."

She loved, above all, unaffected piety. One day, pointing to a novice who always kept her eyes closed, she remarked: "Look at Sister N. If she had no companion to guide her, she would certainly come to grief. Why shut one's eyes when it is necessary to have them open?"

"Not long after having received the habit," writes one of her fellow-novices, "Sister Marie-Bernard was obliged to go to the infirmary, and towards the end of the month of August I was selected to act as one of the infirmarians. What joy was mine as I took up my duties! It was there that I got to know our young Sister better and was able to admire her patience, her resignation in suffering (for she suffered greatly, both

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morally and physically), her spirit of mortification and her charity.

“During her attacks of asthma, fits of coughing racked her chest; but never a complaint! I only heard her murmur from time to time, ‘*My Jesus!*’ turning her gaze towards her crucifix, with an expression of unutterable love.

“Often she was obliged to spend the whole night seated on the edge of her bed, with her feet upon a chair, so great was the oppression on her chest and her difficulty in breathing. A violent cough, followed by vomiting of blood, continually harassed her, and, when distracted at my inability to afford her any relief, I asked: Are you not suffering terribly, dear Sister?” she replied—*It must be so; don’t trouble about me, it is not worth while.*”

Her condition grew much worse and gave rise to the keenest anxiety. “Our consternation was unbounded, and the whole Novitiate redoubled their prayers and sacrifices to obtain the recovery of their beloved companion. ‘We are not worthy of possessing her,’ said our Novice-Mistress, ‘but we must take heaven by storm.’ For several days candles burned continually before the image of the Blessed Virgin in the Novitiate; but seemingly in vain.”

We read, moreover, in the Annals of the Mother-House: “Sister Marie-Bernard is at the point of death and has received the Last Sacraments. Our Reverend Mother General, desiring that she should be definitely admitted as a member of the Congregation, has obtained a dispensation¹ from the Bishop.

¹The Congregation of the Sisters of Nevers had not yet, at the above date, solicited the Holy See’s approval of their Constitutions, which has since been obtained. Hence the dispensation granted by the Ordinary in his capacity of Superior of the Institute.

It was in fact a profession *in extremis*. Later on, as we shall see, Sister Marie-Bernard made her solemn profession at the expiration of her novitiate.

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The Council has been convoked and Bernadette admitted by a unanimous vote.

"The Bishop, assisted by his Vicar-General, presided at the ceremony; Sister Marie-Bernard pronounced her vows with angelic fervour."

It would seem, however, that Our Lord only permitted this aggravation in His faithful servant's condition in order to hasten the hour of the divine union. Hardly had she given herself irrevocably to Christ than her health was restored.

In her intense happiness at the reception of this favour which she had hardly dared to hope for, believing herself, as she did, unworthy to become a member of the Institute, she took into her hands the crucifix and veil given to the professed Sisters and exclaimed: "*I have them; they are mine; they can never be taken from me. I form part of the Congregation; I can never be sent away.*"

When she was asked as to her health she replied: "*I am better; God would have none of me! I got as far as the door and He said: Go away! It is too soon.*"

Sister Marie-Bernard was soon able to resume the daily life of the Novitiate. In vain did she seek to conceal her virtues and say: "Now I am like everybody else again." The violet is discovered by its perfume; and thus it was with the young religious. The breath of her humility perfumed the solitude to which she had been transplanted by the Immaculate Virgin. When she happened to arrive late at one of the exercises of the Novitiate, through having been detained by the accomplishment of an act of charity at the bedside of a sick Sister, she would throw herself on her knees before all and perform the prescribed penance as if she had been guilty of negligence, accepting her Mistress' reprimand without seeking to excuse herself.

Mother Marie-Thérèse, who had a passion for fash-

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ioning souls, used her chisel specially upon those to whom the Divine Master seemed to have been most liberal with His gifts, so much did she dread for them the snares of pride and vain glory. With what zealous care must she have wrought on the soul of her who had been the confidante of Our Lady! Hence, the ceaseless humiliations and mortifications which never produced a murmur from the humble novice's lips.

Her companions could but admire her and be edified by her humility. One of them, although herself a very fervent religious, confesses: "With my scant generosity I went so far as to say to myself: What a mercy I am not Bernadette!"

Sister Marie-Bernard's happiness remained unruffled. She wrote to the Sisters at Lourdes: "*You spoke to me with enthusiasm of this holy house, but what you told me falls far short of the reality. I am tempted to exclaim, with the Apostle: It is good for us to be here! It is, therefore, needless for me to tell you how happy I am.*"

Neither did the novice's filial and respectful affection for her Mother-Mistress suffer any diminution. About this time, Mother Marie-Thérèse returned to the Community after an absence of a few days, and all her novices were in waiting in the cloisters to welcome her back. No sooner did she appear than Sister Marie-Bernard threw herself into her arms, like a child at the sight of a long-lost mother. "Aren't you excited at seeing your Mistress again!" remarked one of the nuns.

"Yes," she replied, "I am afraid I gave way far too freely to my natural feelings I feel thoroughly ashamed of myself."

Who can help admiring the virginal delicacy of this loving heart!

Bernadette was looked upon by her companions as their guardian angel, but good care was taken not to

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let her suspect it; otherwise she would have been obliged to cease a function which she exercised quite unconsciously. If a newcomer were sad, she would, without intruding, find means to cheer her with a bright smile or encouraging word, sometimes even with an artless little remark. "Have you had a good cry for your mother?" she whispered in the ear of one who had been particularly confided to her care. Then when she felt herself understood, and had been rewarded by a responsive glance, eloquent of courage regained, she would softly vanish. One day when she was asked to speak an edifying word to a group of companions in whose company she was, she exclaimed hastily: "*Alas! what can you expect to get out of a stone!*" Her humility, however, was more eloquent than words.

"A couple of days after my arrival at Nevers," writes a religious, "speaking to the Superior who had accompanied me thither, I expressed my surprise and disappointment at not having so far made the acquaintance of Bernadette. As it happened, at the very moment of speaking, a very young Sister was with me at the reverend Mother's side, and the latter, pointing to her, replied: 'Bernadette!—but here she is!'

"I had doubtless conceived a more imposing ideal of the heroine of the Apparitions, and was guilty of an unseemly and almost impertinent rejoinder: 'That girl!' I exclaimed. Immediately, with a spontaneous and charming gesture, the humble novice offered me her hand and smilingly replied: '*Yes! Mademoiselle! just this girl you are looking at; neither more nor less!*'

"I still feel ashamed of myself when I think of my shortsightedness and of her great humility."

It was useless to conceal Sister Marie-Bernard's identity from the new postulants; equally useless to re-edit the letters of those who described to their

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families their impressions of the "Flower of the Pyrénées," and the admiration in which they held her: New arrivals quickly seized upon some point, which marked her out from her companions. One identified her by her eyes, which retained, as it were, the reflection of the hidden wonders upon which it had been their privilege to gaze; another was struck by her pious and recollected attitude; a third by the sight of the young novice praying with several others before the statue of Our Lady in the Noviciate, a sight which called forth the involuntary exclamation: "That must be Bernadette!"

The means of identification were various, but the result was invariably the same.

At recreation-time Sister Marie-Bernard was the very soul of gaiety. One day, placing herself between two of the tallest of the novices, she cried: "*Just look at me. Not much good for one of my size to set up for being a personage.*"

She would laugh with all her heart at the idea "that her portrait was on daily sale at Lourdes for the sum of 10 centimes¹ and used to say that it was *as much as ever she was worth!*"

Occasionally she would sing snatches of Pyrénéan ditties in her native dialect and was greatly amused to see that nobody understood a word of their meaning. But even in the midst of her innocent gaiety it was rarely that a word about God or things divine failed to rise spontaneously from her heart to her lips. All roads led her back to Him who was her true centre. When passing an apple tree she would remark: "*Oh! how I dislike apples; they always remind me of original sin!*"² Or again, "*Grapes: that's better;*

¹Two cents.

²Concerning the forbidden fruit, A. J. Maas, S.J. ("Christ in Type and Prophecy," ch. 2, note 6) has the following: "Some interpreters believe that the forbidden fruit was that of the fig tree; others speak of dates, but the *more common opinion assigns the apple-tree*



*Mother's House of the Sisters of Charity and
Christian Instruction of Nerves (Saint Gildard)*

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they make me think of Our Saviour's Precious Blood."

"One thing particularly struck me," says a fellow-novice. It sometimes happened that the first stroke of the bell announcing the end of recreation would surprise us in the very midst of a hearty, not to say boisterous, burst of laughter; immediately, and without effort, her whole being would resume the deepest calm and recollection, as if she were just coming out of chapel. She would appear already lost in contemplation of Our Lord before the rest of us had succeeded in regaining mastery of ourselves."

Suffering, however, never ceased to be the portion of her predestined soul; we shall see later to what extent she was its victim. "Whenever God honours a soul with one of those special calls, which are the prelude to great lives, behind the veil which He partially withdraws, He shows the altar and chalice of sacrifice." Sister Marie-Bernard was destined to be no exception to this rule; we shall see her immolate herself upon the "altar" and drain the "chalice" of love and suffering. To use her own words, this was her special work—"Son emploi."

Her greatest happiness was to follow the exercises of the Novitiate with her companions, but very often sickness confined her to the infirmary. She never complained, and, forgetful of self, would beg her neighbours' pardon for keeping them awake by her violent fits of coughing. When anyone went to her assistance at night, during one of her attacks of asthma, she would say: "Please don't trouble," in a tone of profound regret for the disturbance she imagined she was causing. The Sisters, on the contrary, esteemed such service a joy rather than a trouble, and there was not one of them who did not deem it a privilege

as that on which God's prohibition rested (Estius). This opinion may be based on Cant. viii. 5, 'Under the apple tree I raised thee up; there thy mother was corrupted,' and on the fact that the tree was 'fair to the eyes.'"—[Ed. Eng. Ed.]

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to wait upon her, and thus be in closer contact with her, finding edification in the sight of her cheerful acceptance of suffering.

“Don’t be afraid to pull,” said she one day when they were renewing the bandages on her shoulders (an attempt had been made by the application of blisters to stop the hæmorrhage attendant on the attacks). *“Don’t be afraid to pull; I can stand a lot of pain; I must have as many lives as a cat.”*

But physical sufferings and humiliations did not alone compose her cross; she was afflicted also in the dearest affections of her heart. On Saturday, December 8th, 1866, her mother, “who seemed to have lost all taste for life after the departure of her daughter,”¹ passed away to heaven, to see face to face the One on whom her child had already gazed on earth.

How divinely appropriate was the choice made by God of the day² upon which He pleased to call to Himself the mother of Bernadette. “The little messenger of the *Immaculate Conception*,” Sister Marie-Bernard, who tenderly loved her mother, fainted upon hearing of her death, but when she came to herself again her first word was, *“Thy will be done. My God, it is Thy holy Will; I accept the cup Thou offerest me; blessed be Thy holy Name!”*

Thus in the crucible of suffering Bernadette was prepared for her religious profession. She and all her companions made it together on October 30th, 1867.

More than ever did she now belong to Jesus; how acceptable to Him must have been the offering of her heart, overflowing with the love of God, aspiring to union with Him by prayer, comprehending the folly of the cross and hungering after its attractions!

¹It was Bernadette’s Aunt Bernade who thus expressed herself.

²8th December, Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

II

NURSE AND SACRISTAN

HENCEFORTH, Sister Marie-Bernard was to belong wholly to God. She was delivered over to His good pleasure. The hour of entry upon their apostleship had sounded for herself and all her companions who had just pledged their virgin troth to the Divine Spouse. They were about to leave God's "Holy Hill," the stronghold and refuge of their family in religion.

On the evening of their profession, the Sisters of the Mother-House, together with the religious, gathered together for the general retreat, were assembled in the hall of the Novitiate. Mgr. Forcade, who presided, delivered to each of the newly professed Sisters her letter of obedience.

The Master of the Vineyard, speaking by the mouth of the Superiors, appointed her allotted task to each, and this task, no matter in what quarter of the field it lay, seemed to each the better part, grateful, as she was, to be held worthy to put her hand to the plough.

After Christ's taking possession of their souls, how could they do otherwise than cry in their turn: "All that in me lies is Thine, O! my God! Thine to dispose of in labour or in suffering, Thine for the advancement of Thy designs, Thine for Thy uses and Thy good pleasure!"

Probably none of them possessed more sincerity and love than Sister Marie-Bernard. But whither was holy obedience about to direct her steps? The child of the Grotto had taken refuge in the shadow of the Cloister "to hide herself," and the Superior General was willing to leave her in silence and shadow, in the sacred atmosphere of the Mother-

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House. This was, however, a privilege, and not to be granted without some corresponding humiliation, the infliction of which was previously arranged for in concert with the Bishop.

All the letters of obedience were distributed in their turn, hers alone was missing. "And Sister Marie-Bernard?" asked Mgr. Forcade. "Monseigneur," replied the Reverend Mother General, "we are at a loss to know what to do with her; *she is absolutely good for nothing.*" "Well, what is to be done?" If your Lordship consents, we will, as a favour, try to make some use of her here to help in the infirmary; it is the only thing she is capable of doing." The Bishop approved and gave his blessing to the young religious, who was deeply sensible to this humiliation, inflicted, as it was, in public (she confessed as much at a later period), but she never allowed her emotion to appear, and at recreation her companions found her as amiable and expansive as ever.

Let us follow her to her corner of the vineyard. We shall see her wearing herself out in charity, loving kindness, and fortitude. "She nursed the sick with infinite tact," says a religious. "Uniformly tender, smiling, and good-humoured, in spite of her own exhaustion, her assiduous care for them was *that of a Mother.*"

Another writes: "A few months after entering the Novitiate, I was laid up with typhoid fever and had the privilege of being nursed by Sister Marie-Bernard. I shall never forget her devoted care of me during my illness."

The young nurse was the personification of goodness.

When she approached a sick-bed, it was as if an angel of charity had appeared, so well did she know how to speak words of encouragement and inspire calm and consolation by her presence. To these qualities she added a holy joyousness not devoid of a

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touch of humour: "She would seek to enliven her patients by telling them interesting stories, in to which a note of piety was always introduced, and so for a moment cause them to forget their sufferings."

Such were the leading characteristics of Sister Marie-Bernard in her capacity of nurse in the infirmary. Let us endeavour to trace her portrait a little more in detail. She could not witness suffering without being moved to compassion. One evening there was an outbreak of fire in the pharmacy. The novice who was in charge received such a shock to her nerves as to cause a violent internal commotion accompanied by spasms, and it was impossible to give her relief or stop her screams for twenty-four hours.

Sister Marie-Bernard, unable to find any means of calming her, said to one of her companions: "We will try some Lourdes water. Come and kneel down with me, and let us try to pray fervently." A few minutes later, Our Lady vouchsafed to answer their faith and prayer, and the novice's sufferings ceased.

On another occasion she threw herself on her knees to address a supplication to the Blessed Virgin. "You are praying to the Blessed Virgin before an image of St. Joseph," objected the patient. "*Never mind*", she replied, "*they are all of one mind in heaven; there is no jealousy there.*"

Again to another sufferer: "*You are in pain, wait a moment, I am going to see what my father can do for you.*" "Your father?" "Yes, my father; don't you know that St. Joseph is my father now?"

It was rare that her prayers and intercession remained fruitless. If "confidence suffices to establish a bond of sympathy between God and His creature" why not between saint and saint! Confidence and sympathy are capable of bringing heaven down upon earth! But Sister Marie-Bernard with all her goodness could be firm when occasion required.

A religious relates the following: "During my

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Novitiate I was privileged to pass two days in the infirmary under the care of Sister Marie-Bernard. Following upon a season of great affliction I had two violent attacks of fever and there were grave reasons to fear a third. Our beloved Mother Mistress, who had guessed the cause of my indisposition, came to console me, and her visit, together with the intelligent care bestowed upon me, caused me to pass an excellent night. The following morning, as I felt quite myself again, I got up and went to hear Holy Mass. I returned to the infirmary about half-past eight, when I had finished my devotions. Upon my return, one of my companions told how dissatisfied Sister Marie-Bernard was with my conduct in having got up without permission.

"I at once set off to look for her, but she found means to elude my search without leaving the wards of the infirmary. Eventually I found her and laid before her my reasons for acting thus, which I believed to be excellent. Sister Marie-Bernard, however, spoke to me with such conviction of the sanctity of religious obedience, which, she declared, was just as binding in the infirmary as in the Novitiate, that in spite of the spirit of independence—still firmly inrooted in me—I said: 'What ought I to do?' 'Go back to bed at once,' she replied. It went against the grain, but I was so impressed that I did immediately as she desired."

One of her patients, a postulant, whom she had warned to keep well covered up in bed, began to tire of the restraint and took the liberty of producing her manual of the Children of Mary, which she had kept by her, in order to recite the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin. Sister Marie-Bernard caught her in the act, and exclaimed: "*A pretty devotion which commences by disobedience!*" She confiscated the book and its owner never saw it again.

About this time Doctor Voisin, physician at the

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Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris, propounding his theory that hallucinations almost always result in madness, went on to say that, "The Apparitions of Lourdes have no other foundation than the assertions of a child suffering from hallucinations, who has since been placed in confinement in the Ursuline Convent at Nevers." No sooner had this assertion been brought to his notice than the Bishop of Nevers addressed the following communication to the Editor of the "Univers."

"MY DEAR SIR :

"As you are doubtless aware, a doctor attached to the Salpêtrière Hospital, in the course of a lecture on hallucinations, has asserted that Bernardette Soubirous, in religion Sister Marie-Bernard, has been confined as of unsound mind in the Ursuline Convent at Nevers. Will you oblige me by publishing this letter in which I have the honour to inform you that:

"1. Sister Marie-Bernard has never set foot in the Ursuline Convent at Nevers.

"2. Whilst it is true that she is in residence at Nevers in the Mother-House of the Sisters of Charity and of Christian Instruction, it is equally a fact that she entered this establishment from the first, and still remains there, of her own free will, and enjoys the same liberty as any other of the Sisters.

"3. Far from being of unsound mind, *she is a person of unusual good sense*, and perfect self-possession.

"Furthermore, I take the liberty of inviting the distinguished professor of the Salpêtrière to come personally, and assure himself of the accuracy of the foregoing statements.

"If he would be good enough to advise me of the date of his visit, I would undertake to arrange for his

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having an interview with Sister Marie-Bernard, and lest he should entertain any doubt as to her identity, I would ask Monsieur le Procureur de la République to be kind enough to introduce her to him. He would then be at perfect liberty to examine and question her as fully as he pleased.

“For my part, I can assure him of a most courteous reception.

“AUGUSTIN, Bishop of Nevers.

“October 3d, 1872.”

Previous to this, two or three months after the publication of Doctor Voisin's lecture, Doctor Damoiseau, President of the Medical Association of the Department of the Orne, had written to Doctor Robert St. Cyr, President of the Medical Association of the Department of the Nièvre, asking him to furnish him with definite particulars as to Bernadette's mental condition.

His answer was as follows:

“NEVERS, September 3d, 1872.

“MY DEAR COLLEAGUE:

“You could not have applied to any one better qualified than myself to supply the information you desire as to the heroine of Lourdes, now known as Sister Marie-Bernard. As accredited medical adviser of the Community, I have for a long time past attended the young Sister in question, whose delicate health has been a great cause of anxiety to us. She is now very much better and has abandoned the rôle of patient for that of nurse in the infirmary, acquitting herself admirably of her duties in this capacity.

“She is in her twenty-seventh year, small and frail in appearance. Calm and gentle by nature, she tends the sick with real intelligence and scrupulous obe-

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dience to instructions. She exercises a real authority over her patients, and I place entire confidence in her.

"You will see from the foregoing, my dear colleague, that Sister Marie-Bernard is far from being of unsound mind. I do not hesitate to go farther, and affirm that her quiet, unsophisticated, and equable character offers an ample safeguard against any danger of this nature.

"I am delighted, my dear colleague, to have had this opportunity of making your acquaintance and obliging you with the information you desired.

"DR. ROBERT ST. CYR.

"President of the Medical Association of the Department of the Nièvre."

This communication from the medical attendant of the Mother-House is sufficient to show the high esteem in which he held the services of Sister Marie-Bernard as nurse in the infirmary.

She continued to fill this post until 1874, when the doctor expressed the opinion "that it was dangerous for a person in so delicate a state of health to be permanently confined in the vitiated atmosphere of a sick-room." She was accordingly transferred to the Sacristy. In many respects her new duties must have offered more attractions than the former, but she never allowed her feelings to appear. "Her one idea was to render a blind obedience, without ever permitting her satisfaction or dissatisfaction to become evident."¹

Who can doubt that she threw her whole soul into her new duties—duties of which the very angels themselves are envious, and to which she owed the privilege of being, as it were, the guardian of the

¹"Notice sur Sœur Marie-Bernard," by Mgr. Forcade.

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Tabernacle, the constant companion of Our Lord in His Eucharistic retreat. What must have been the colloquies that passed between her pure and childlike soul and the Divine Master?

One Christmas Eve, when the Crib had been prepared, Sister Marie-Bernard, taking up the Infant-Jesus to lay Him in His place, was heard to whisper: "You must have been dreadfully cold, poor little One! in the stable of Bethlehem. What heartless people they must have been to refuse You shelter!"

In her new capacity Sister Marie-Bernard was exposed to the curiosity of all those who came to visit the chapel. It was a common occurrence for them to stop her and say: "Can we not manage to get a glimpse of Bernadette, Sister?" She would listen courteously, vanish as if to look for the person in request, and never reappear.

Her humility was wounded by this continual contact with outsiders, and her Superiors, aware of the fact, did all in their power to withdraw her from public notice. It was not long, however, before Sister Marie-Bernard was reduced to one solitary service—a service far more meritorious than all others—"confided to her expressly by God, and forming in reality the sole object of her life in religion: the offering of herself as a victim for the expiation of sin, the triumph of the Church and the redemption of France."

III

THE RELIGIOUS

IF "the religious life is in itself a priceless gift upon which eternal love delights to dwell in a special manner," what shall we say to the soul of the true religious, transfigured by humility, mortification and charity, "so as to make of her entire being, a living chalice consecrated to the Divine Master!" Since eternal love delights to dwell therein, what must be the joy of those of us who are privileged, not merely to gaze from afar, but to cross the threshold of this living sanctuary, to contemplate its beauties, to receive from it those supernatural lights which determine great renunciations and invite to the supreme summits.

In the present case the "chalice" is Sister Marie-Bernard, the child of Lourdes. "Under the eyes of the Blessed Virgin and encouraged by her smile she studies the mystery of the Christ as adapted to her capacity by Mary herself."

In her turn she reveals this mystery to us, not only "by giving us all, ignorant and learned alike, a comprehension of the works of God and of the depths of His wisdom and goodness,"¹ but also by showing us this mystery perpetuated in her life of humility, suffering, and self-immolation.

Mgr. Lelong, preaching on the occasion of Sister Marie-Bernard's funeral, spoke with admiration of the young virgin's humility.

"You are all my witnesses," he exclaimed; "you, my Sisters, will bear me out when I say that there was never any attempt made to hide her: it was she who hid herself and never as completely as she would have

¹Mgr. Latty.

wished. How she loved this her chosen refuge! How she dreaded the thought of being obliged to leave it! How much she feared that, having fled the world, the world, in spite of all, might come and seek her out in her retreat.

"She preferred not to speak of the past, it seemed almost as if she desired to forget it, or at any rate to allow it to be forgotten by those around her. She had come hither to bury herself completely in solitude, hiding within her the secret of the King, and never ceased to proclaim that she was supremely happy in her self-effacement.

"Her humility, proof against the honours bestowed upon her from on high, is worthy of our admiration and praise! Has not St. Bernard said of humility that it is so rare a thing that no purely earthly soil can give birth to a plant so precious!" Humility, the crowning virtue of the Blessed Virgin, was also the most prominent characteristic of her privileged child.

Being asked one day, by one of her Superiors, whether she had felt no temptation of self-esteem in having been favoured so signally by the Blessed Virgin, she replied: *"What an idea you must have of me! As if I did not know that the Our Blessed Lady chose of me it was because I was the most ignorant of creatures. If she could have discovered another more ignorant she would have chosen her in my place."*

"What possible merit can I claim?" she replied on another occasion. "The Blessed Virgin made use of me just as if I had been a stone." And again, "I only acted like the oxen at Bétharram, which turned up a statue by chance while they were ploughing."

"One day when she was in the infirmary," relates one of her fellow-religious, "I showed her a view of the Grotto, and whilst she was looking at it I allowed my eyes to dwell on her with an expression of veneration. Possibly she was conscious of this, for immed-

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imately after she said: What do you use a broom for?' 'What a question,' said I. 'Why, to sweep with, of course!' 'And when you have finished with it?' 'I put it back in its place.' 'Where is that?' 'Why, in the corner, behind the door.' 'Exactly! that is just my case; the Blessed Virgin made use of me, and when my work was done, put me away in corner. It is the proper place for me. I am happy in it, and there I shall stay.'

We have already seen how at Lourdes the humility of Mary's witness constituted a forcible argument in favour of the supernatural origin of the apparitions. Père Sempé, subsequently Superior of the Fathers of the Grotto, has described how he himself was vanquished by it.

He says: "It was during the summer holidays following upon the apparitions: I was preaching at a retreat for the Children of Mary at Lourdes, and availing myself of the opportunity to see Bernadette, had her brought to the presbytery, where I questioned her, examined and cross-examined her minutely. After I had dismissed her, I followed her with my eyes and noticed that she was unable to conceal a little movement of relief at her release. I believed myself to have been fooled. I determined to see her again and had her summoned a few hours later. I changed my tactics at the second interview, and in my most serious and earnest manner preached her a veritable sermon upon the virtue of humility, accompanied by considerations calculated to put her upon her guard against illusion and self-glory, with *personal applications very capable of wounding her feelings*. Bernadette listened, her head bent with deep attention, and when I had finished replied simply: 'You are perfectly right, Monsieur l'Abbé; I thank you and I shall try to profit by what you have said.' These words were spoken with such an accent of humility as to touch me profoundly, and from that

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moment I became a firm believer in Bernadette's sincerity."

At Nevers she asked as a favour not to be obliged to go to the visitors' room. When, through force of circumstances, she was obliged to appear there, it was a real sacrifice for her, and her face would momentarily betray the annoyance it caused her; nevertheless, she would immediately yield to the dictates of holy obedience, and, whoever the visitor might be, show herself modest and simple as ever.

Mgr. Forcade writes as follows : "I have had the satisfaction of presenting her successively to His Eminence Cardinal Donnet, the Papal Nuncio, Mgr. Chigi, and several other Bishops. Upon all of them she produced the most favourable impression, and I never noticed that the benevolent interest evinced in her by these Princes of the Church in any way endangered her humility. Whilst showing them the greatest deference, she remained as simple and natural in their presence as in her intercourse with the most commonplace of mortals.

"Noticing one day that a very exalted ecclesiastic had assumed an attitude of the highest admiration in her presence, and, fearing that she was aware of it, I said sharply: 'What are you waiting for? We have seen you; that is quite enough; we do not require your presence any longer.' She withdrew immediately, without a word or sign of reluctance, and with a smile on her lips."¹

It would be safe to say that the higher the rank occupied by visitors, either in the Church or in Society, the greater was her repugnance to be brought into contact with them.

One day she had gone with a few other young Sisters to spend the day at Coulanges near Nevers, in a little country house belonging to the educational

¹"Notice sur S^r Marie-Bernard" by Mgr Forcade.

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establishment of Notre-Dame des Anges. She delighted in this quiet spot, close to a chapel, where she could visit Our Lord, and manifested a childish joy in rambling about there and sitting in the shade of an avenue of trees close to the river's bank. "*It reminds me of Lourdes,*" said she. But, in the course of the afternoon, whilst she was enjoying herself merrily with her companions, a message came from the Mother-House, bidding them return at once : several Bishops had arrived and were waiting to see them!¹

"Ah! those good Bishops," said she to one of her companions with an expression of childish petulance; "how much better it would be for them to stop quietly in their dioceses, instead of coming to trouble us when we were so happy here."

She really suffered when she was pointed out to the notice of visitors to the Mother-House. At a meeting of the entire community in the hall of the Novitiate, a worthy Prelate was passing between the ranks of the assembled religious, when, just before he reached the place occupied by Sister Marie-Bernard, the Superior commenced to point out the Sisters one by one:

"Monsignor, this Sister is from the diocese of Rodez; here is another from Paris; and this one here is from Beauvais, etc., etc."

Sister Marie-Bernard had perceived the stratagem, and, finding herself close to a door, slipped out. One of her companions tried to stop her. Knowing her weak point—a desire to do all she could for the suffering souls in Purgatory—her companion whispered: "You are forgetting the forty day's indulgence for kissing the Bishop's ring; you will lose it!"

"*My Jesus mercy!*" she exclaimed. "*There, that will gain a hundred days' indulgence,*" and there upon disappeared.

¹In sending to recall all the Sisters, the intention was to safeguard the humility of Sister Marie-Bernard, who in reality was the only one whose presence was desired.

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Sometimes her desire to pass unnoticed was mingled with a grain of malice. The preacher of a retreat at the Mother-House manifested the desire to make her acquaintance. The Mother Superior seized upon a pretext to give him an opportunity of seeing her, and when she had appeared, in answer to a summons, said: "You see, Father, here is a novice; observe how her silk veil differs from that of the professed Sisters." Sister Marie-Bernard was quite alive to the subterfuge and covered up her face as much as she could. She remarked afterwards, "*I guessed what they wanted, but I don't think he saw much.*"

Nevertheless, occasions often arose where, in spite of her love for self-effacement, she was forced to put herself in evidence.

Mgr. Landriot, being on a visit to Nevers, the conversation turned on the question of Lourdes, and he declared to Mgr. Forcade with some warmth: "So far as I am concerned, I have no faith in Bernadette."

"As you will, Monseigneur," was the reply. "Bernadette is far from being an article of faith, but have you ever made her acquaintance?"

"No! and I do not desire to do so." In spite of his protestation, Mgr. Forcade conducted him the following day to the Mother-House, and brought him face to face with Sister Marie-Bernard. She replied to all his questions with her habitual simplicity.

In taking leave Mgr. Landriot declared himself convinced. "I believe in her now," said he. "I believe in her and confess myself defeated. I am at a loss to explain how an unsophisticated shepherdess of the Pyrénées has so easily routed me, except by divine assistance."

Another distinguished Prelate, Mgr. Dupanloup, called one day incognito, and asked to be allowed to see Sister Marie-Bernard. The Sister doorkeeper, upon being accosted by this modest ecclesiastic, hesitated to accede to his request, but upon his dis-



Sister Mary Bernard Loubirous

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closing his identity as Bishop of Orléans, she hastened to inform the Reverend Mother-General, who gave her permission for the young Sister to wait upon him in the visitors' room. "He seemed deeply affected," said Sister Marie-Bernard; "I saw tears in his eyes whilst he was speaking to me."

The Prince of Clermont-Tonnerre journeyed expressly from Pau to see her. He was a benefactor of the orphanage of the Sisters of Nevers in that town, and it was only right to gratify his desire. After the interview the Superior General proposed that the Prince should make a tour of the establishment, an invitation which he accepted with pleasure and gratitude. During the course of his round he seemed absorbed in thought.

When he was opposite the cross which occupies the centre of the Community Quadrangle, he suddenly stopped and, turning to the Sister who was accompanying him, said: "I must make a clean breast of it, Sister; I arrived here incredulous, but I shall leave you with a firm conviction of the truth of the Apparitions." A glimpse of Sister Marie-Bernard, and the sound of her voice, impregnated with its accent of sincerity, had sufficed to effect a revolution in his preconceived ideas.

It would be easy to accumulate evidence in proof of Sister Marie-Bernard's desire to remain hidden; her Superiors did all in their power to encourage her desire. To defeat idle curiosity, it became customary to reply: "She is just exactly like the other Sisters." This expression became a sort of watchword. In spite of these restrictions, it happened one day that a lady had obtained the Superior General's permission to speak with her. No sooner had she crossed the threshold of the convent than she perceived a religious who did her best to get out of the way as quickly as possible: "Sister! Sister!" she cried. "Can I see Bernadette?" The fugitive, who was none other

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than Bernadette herself, opened the door of the reception room for her, bowed politely and vanished as if to seek the person in request, but, instead of doing so, she took her work and installed herself in a solitary nook in the garden, where she was specially permitted to go for fresh air. The lady, tired of waiting, again demanded Bernadette. She was searched for everywhere except where she was. She was doubtless aware of the hue and cry, but gave no sign of her presence, only too happy for once to escape undiscovered.

A venerable Superior well known at Nevers, whose educational labours have since enriched society with a galaxy of matrons distinguished by their accomplishment and piety, relates that her mother having come to visit her, she took her to St. Gildard, in order to comply with her ardent desire to see Bernadette. Upon their arrival they found Bernadette in the quadrangle, but no sooner did she become aware of the presence of a stranger than she disappeared. "I managed to overtake her at last," writes the narrator, and said to her: 'If your mother were here, I should receive her with a little better grace.' Seeing that I was really hurt, she showed the utmost eagerness to make amends, returned with me to meet my mother, kissed her affectionately, and made herself so agreeable that my mother afterwards remarked that, although delighted to be able to pass a few hours with me (it was several years since we had last met), she derived still greater satisfaction from Bernadette's kiss."

It is, therefore, evident that the young religious knew how to sacrifice upon occasion her love of silence and solitude, in order to give pleasure to one of her Sisters and to breathe into a casual greeting the spirit of true charity and sisterly affection.

"Sister Marie-Bernard was deeply attached to my mother," writes one of her contemporaries. "Was it

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because the latter never questioned her on the subject of the Apparitions? (I had made her a special recommendation to this effect which she had scrupulously observed.) It is quite possible; but I love to attribute her partiality to another motive. My mother was a saint and the saints understand and love one another by instinct.¹ While Sister Marie-Bernard, was ill and unable to receive my mother in the infirmary, she obtained permission to be carried to a room outside the Community precincts in order to converse with her."

She knew how to welcome with gratitude the benefactors of our Community. Father Sempé, Superior of the Fathers of the Grotto, and Monsieur Lasserre, the historian of Our Lady of Lourdes, can testify to the warmth of her reception.

Her attitude to little children may be imagined, their innocence exercised a powerful attraction upon her, and she resembled them closely in their simplicity of heart.

One day, a tiny mite of four, the niece of one of the Sisters, was granted the special privilege of visiting Sister Marie-Bernard in the infirmary. The child entered the room as if it were a sanctuary, tip-toed to her bedside and whispered timidly: "Have you seen the Blessed Virgin, Sister!" "Yes, my child." "Was she so very beautiful?" Sister Marie-Bernard's face lit up, and an expression of unspeakable joy spread over her features as she replied: "*Oh! yes, so beautiful that when one has once set eyes upon her one would joyfully die to see her again!*"

The child could not help being impressed by her accents so full of faith and love, and added: "Please pray for me, Sister, and for mamma as well." "Yes,

¹This pious matron, after having lost her husband and consecrated her only child to religion, offered herself to God as a victim for the salvation of the Church and of France. From that moment her bodily sufferings were such as to make of her life a perpetual martyrdom.

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I will," said Bernadette; "but you must promise, in return, to pray for me." The delighted child could not tear herself away from the Sister who had seen the Blessed Virgin, and when she at last consented to take her departure, she did so walking backwards, keeping her eyes fixed upon Sister Marie-Bernard in absorbed admiration.¹

We have seen how in the Novitiate, Sister Marie-Bernard was generous in her acceptance of humiliations: the same was true of her during the entire course of her religious life. A Sister relates that she was one day going upstairs with her from the hall of the Novitiate to the infirmary, when they happened to run into the arms of the Mother General who, doubtless desiring to put them to the test, called them a couple of "good-for-nothings." Sister Marie-Bernard's companion was still sensitive to any attempt to kill her self-esteem and promptly began to cry. "You cry for such a little thing as that," remarked her friend. "Come! cheer up; you'll get worse knocks than that before you have finished."

The same religious was on several occasions a witness to the often unmerited reproaches addressed to Sister Marie-Bernard, and testifies that she never remarked the least impatience on her part. She accepted them with calm and in a spirit of piety.

Nevertheless, Sister Marie-Bernard was extremely sensitive: the victim was indeed one to the Master's taste, full of vitality and capacity for suffering. She herself writes in her private memoranda: "When human feelings begin to get beyond control, I must remember the words of Our Saviour: *It is I! fear not!*"

"When I suffer from the contempt of my Superiors

¹The child's name was Madeleine Darfeuille, afterward Madame de Blic. She never forgot her visit and chose for the principal actions of her life the Festivals of the Blessed Virgin. She died young and now knows for herself how beautiful is Mary. From heaven she watches over and protects her beloved ones.

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or my companions, when I bleed from the humiliations that they inflict upon me, I must never fail immediately to offer thanks to Our Lord who has deigned to bestow a great grace upon my unworthy self, in permitting me *to bear a stinging word and thereby take one step nearer to Himself.*

“Generous love for the Divine Master is a pruning knife capable of destroying the tree of pride and its poisonous roots. The more the ‘old man’ is conquered in me the more the ‘new man’ will come to maturity. The more I humble myself, the greater will be my place in the Heart of Jesus, my Beloved. The dutiful bride follows her spouse wheresoever he goes.”

The Divine Mother was constantly present to support her child. We have a note of a prayer addressed to her by Sister Marie-Bernard under the date of May 12th, 1866, and which reads as follows: *“Mother of compassion, thou didst stoop to earth to make thyself visible to a humble child, and reveal to her thy secrets, in spite of her great unworthiness. How great should be her humility! Thou, the Queen of Heaven and of Earth didst deign to use as thy instrument the most feeble of creatures. O Mary, vouchsafe to her, who presumes to call herself thy child, the priceless virtue of humility. Grant, Most Tender of Mothers, that thy child may follow in thy footsteps always and in all circumstances, and that she may be a child after thine own heart and that of thy Divine son.”*¹

The letter which she wrote to the Holy Father² on December 17th, 1876, breathes the same atmosphere of simplicity, candour and humility.

¹Extract from Sister Marie Bernard’s private notes.

²It was at the request of the Bishop of Nevers, who was leaving for Rome that she wrote to the Holy Father. Pius IX was pleased to send her the Apostolic benediction accompanied by a crucifix to which he had expressly attached a plenary indulgence “in articulo mortis.”

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"I feared at first to commit an indiscretion, but on second thought it occurred to me that Our Lord loves to be importuned by the little, as well as the great, the poor as well as the rich, and that He gives Himself to each one of us without distinction of persons. This reflection gave me courage. . . .

". . . What can I do, Holy Father, to prove to you my filial affection? I can only continue *to suffer* and *to pray* as I have done up to the present. Some years ago, though all unworthy, I enlisted as one of Your Holiness' bodyguard. My arms are prayer and sacrifice, and I shall only lay them down with my last breath. When that moment comes I shall no longer be able to use the latter, but prayer will never cease to be a weapon which I shall continue to wield in heaven.

"The most Holy Virgin must constantly turn her maternal gaze upon you, Holy Father, for was it not you who proclaimed her '*Immaculate*'?

"I love to think that you must be particularly dear to the Blessed Mother, since four years after that proclamation she came herself to earth to say: 'I am the Immaculate Conception.'

"I had no idea at the time what she meant: I had never heard the word. But since, in thinking it over, I often say to myself: How good the Blessed Virgin was. It seems as if she had come to confirm the Holy Father's words."

Some readers may think that we are wasting too much space in expatiating on the humility of Sister Marie-Bernard. Our excuse must be that it was as a sweet-smelling casket in which her whole life lay hidden.

One day she was asked whether the treatment to which she was subjected by the Novice-Mistress left no trace of bitterness in her heart. "Oh! no," she replied with warmth; "the Novice-Mistress knows what she is about; I have lots of pride, but now that I am here I shall try to break myself of it."

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The Sisters, who came to the Mother-House for retreats would besiege Sister Marie-Bernard. "Mr. So-and-So, Mrs. So-and-So, ask your prayers." "Ah!" she would reply, "they want prayers, do they! So do I! Let them pray for me, and they may rest assured that I shall not remain in their debt; for I pray every day for those who remember me in their prayers."

One of the Sisters, asking her one day for a memento in her prayers, she replied, "With pleasure! but you, on your part, must pray for me, *who am consumed with vanity*." The last words were pronounced with such a spirit of conviction that the religious was dumbfounded.

One of her particular desires was that they should not neglect to pray for her after her death.

"They will say," she complained, "Sister Marie-Bernard was *a saint*, and then leave me to roast in purgatory." Her very imperfections were like fuel added to the fire, they served to deepen her humility. She possessed the volcanic southern temperament,—few are those who escape the characteristics of their race —. When in spite of all her efforts to overcome this natural petulance, she would happen to speak with impatience, she would immediately make an act of humility and public reparation.

"My relations with Sister Marie-Bernard were always most cordial," writes another Sister. "One day, however, when an article of her clothing had been brought to her torn, as the result of negligence or accident in the laundry, she expressed her dissatisfaction to me, and as I had charge of the linen, she told me with considerable warmth that I should exercise more care in my supervision. 'Now,' she added, 'it will have to be mended.' Sister Marie-Bernard was very careful of her wardrobe and indeed of everything of which she had the keeping. But she would not let me go without making the most pro-

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fuse apologies: 'I sincerely beg your pardon,' said she, 'for having spoken as I did; pray for me that I may gain the victory over myself.'

"On the occasion of a retreat at the Mother-House, a very young and excessively timid religious had been duly following the exercises. When the day of the general confession arrived, although placed quite close to the confessional she saw all the others pass before her, without anyone troubling to ascertain whether she had taken her turn or not. She was afraid to make a sign, in spite of having passed several hours in waiting.

"Sister Marie-Bernard saw that she was being treated with very little consideration. She rose from her place and left the chapel, returning after a short absence in company with the Mother Assistant. Sister Marie-Bernard explained to her indignantly the young Sister's embarrassment. The Reverend Mother listened to her calmly, said a few appropriate words, and withdrew.

"The injustice was repaired, but before night fell Sister Marie-Bernard made an act of humiliation and begged pardon for her impetuosity. 'For my part,' adds the narrator, 'I could only recognise in the impulse, for which she so bitterly reproached herself, another proof of her charity towards her companions, her love of justice, her goodness to the weak, her delicacy of conscience and profound humility.'

She writes herself in her notes of September 21st, 1875: "My God! when I pause and reflect upon my numberless shortcomings and Thy justice, I am appalled; fear paralyses me. My God! have mercy upon my misery and frailty. Let suffering and trial be my lot. They alone can destroy the '*old man*' in me. Divine life is only possible through the sacrifice of human nature. There is no alternative; I must make this sacrifice if I desire to save my soul."

In virtue of this sacrifice she placed the glory of

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God before everything, making it the goal of her desire, the supreme object of her affections, and the mainspring of all her actions.

We have already witnessed her sublime disinterestedness at Lourdes in the midst of the direst poverty. To borrow the words of Doctor Dozous : "Humble and modest child, indifferent to earthly gain, permit one, who was privileged to minister so far as in him lay to thy bodily weaknesses, to speak of thy holy poverty!

"It would have been easy for thee, simply by stretching out thy hand, to amass a rich fortune in thy native town, thanks to the gold constantly displayed before thine eyes, but which was powerless to tempt thee.

"Permit again the same witness to repeat to thy detractors what he has seen with his own eyes.

"Thou wast in want and thou wouldst never consent to profit by the innumerable alms that pious souls desired to bestow upon thee."

This holy poverty which was so dear to her, Sister Marie-Bernard continued to practise to the uttermost in her life as a religious.

She never sought to choose for herself the articles destined to her daily use and deemed everything too good for her. Even the notes which she made from time to time of her interior life were scribbled on the remnants of old copy-books or on loose leaves, which were subsequently bound together in the form of memoranda. When she was the recipient of certain little souvenirs, although she accepted them with perfect good grace, her first idea was to rid herself of them as quickly as possible.

This detachment from earthly things she extended to her natural preferences; she mortified her tastes, her heart, and refused all human gratifications. "One day", says a Sister, "I made her some broth and carelessly allowed it to burn. I was ashamed to give it

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to her in such a state, but she only laughed and drank it as if it had been exquisite."

Her companions noticed that at meals she always chose the dishes she disliked and refused those which were to her taste.

Often she complained that the Sisters were much too indulgent to her and spoiled her too much. "The poor are never treated like this," she would say. "*Forget that I have a body,*" wrote Sister Marie-Bernard on April 3rd, 1872, to the Superior of the Hospital of Lourdes, "*but never forget to pray for my soul.*"

God had given her a heart as loving as it was pure and delicate, upright and simple, humble and courageous, but created things were incapable of fixing its affections. She tolerated reluctantly any too pronounced exhibitions of natural affection, and on her part did nothing to provoke them. She may well be described as one of those souls who "pour into a common treasury all the tributary affections inspired by those with whom they come in contact, greater or less in degree, as the case may be, but differing nought in their sincerity, and upon them all mount as upon steps to the throne of divine love where God Himself dwells supreme."

In spite of these refinements of a delicately sensitive soul, her heart never ceased to respond to the call of filial love and gratitude.

No father or mother ever had a more affectionate child. Louise Castérot was a witness to this when she said, as we have seen elsewhere, "that she had no longer any taste for life when deprived of her daughter."

François Soubirous, simple, upright and good as he was, and a devout Christian, appreciated so highly his daughter's heart that he bestowed upon her a love approaching veneration. Father Sempé relates that one day when Bernadette's father happened to be

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alone for a moment in the parlour of the missionary Fathers at Lourdes, he dropped on his knees before a picture of his daughter and began to pray with fervour. The sight of his child was sufficient to bring a prayer to his lips.

On Saturday, March 4th, 1871, the anniversary of one of the most glorious of the Apparitions of Our Lady, God was pleased to call him to Himself. "It was the death of a righteous man. A moment before he passed away he pointed with satisfaction to the scapular on his breast. For several hours previously, and up to the moment of drawing his last breath, he never ceased praying."

Sister Marie-Bernard was keenly sensible to this bereavement. A religious, who was at that moment a novice in the Mother House, says: "Having occasion to visit the infirmary, I found her leaning against the mantelpiece crying. I was surprised, for I had not heard of her loss. I knelt down beside her and asked, 'What is the matter, Sister? Have I unconsciously caused you pain?' 'Oh! no,' she replied, 'but a couple of weeks ago it was you who were in trouble (I had lost one of my brothers), and I did my best to comfort you. To-day it is my turn; I have just received news of my poor father's death. He passed away on Saturday. Be sure to cultivate, above all things, a great devotion to the agonising Heart of Jesus, for it is an immense consolation when one loses one's loved ones, and is far from them, to be able to think that one was nevertheless, praying for them at the time. It so happened to me on Saturday evening without my being aware of it, I was praying for those in agony, and thus unconsciously for my poor father, who at that moment was passing into eternity.' "

We will now lay before the eyes of our readers a letter which she wrote on May 15th 1870, to her Mother-General, then in Rome. It will give us an idea of her simplicity and filial affection:

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"MY VERY DEAR AND REVEREND MOTHER:

"I have for a long time past desired to write to you, but ever since you left I have been either ailing or busy with our beloved sufferers. At the present moment the infirmary is empty except for Sister Nathalie, who is very much better and is beginning to be able to take a little exercise in the corridor. I myself have had a swollen face which culminated in an abscess in the mouth, giving me a lot of pain. However, I am about again, none the worse for it, except that my mouth is a little awry. I never forget to offer all the little sufferings and trials, sent me by God, for your intention, praying Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin to bless you and to grant all the petitions of your maternal heart, for the greater glory of God and the sanctification of the souls committed to your charge.

"Neither do I forget in my prayers, however unworthy, any of the persons whom you recommended to me previous to your departure. Especially on the days of Holy Communion do I bear them in mind. I feel my soul filled with strength and confidence when I reflect that it is not I who pray, but Jesus within me. I pray in a very special manner for the intentions of the Council of the Congregation and for our Holy Father the Pope. How happy I should be to receive his benediction!

"I was grieved to hear, Dear Mother, that you were still far from well. I hope, nevertheless, that we shall have the joy of seeing you again shortly. Meanwhile, the time seems very long.

"Please accept, my dear reverend Mother, an assurance of profound and loving respect from your dutiful and grateful daughter in Our Lord Jesus Christ,

"SISTER MARIE-BERNARD SOUBIROUS."

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She was full of veneration for all those who were working at Lourdes towards the realisation of the desires of the Blessed Virgin: the Bishop of Tarbes, Mgr. Peyramale and the Fathers of the Grotto. "They are doing," said she, "the work that I could not do." Their goodness, moreover, to her family filled her heart with gratitude.— As far back as August 20th, 1867, thanks to the good offices of the venerable Curé Peyramale and Father Sempé, with the Bishop of Tarbes, her father, François Soubirous, had been installed as proprietor of the Lacadé mill, situated on the Lapaca brook, and, thanks to their exertions, her family found themselves in relatively easy circumstances after their many vicissitudes. It was generally recognised that it was in obedience to the secret injunctions of the Lady of the Grotto that they had consistently refused all offers of monetary assistance.

After the death of her father, Sister Marie-Bernard, as the eldest of the family, interested herself in the future of her brothers and sisters, and more especially in that of her youngest brother, her god-child. The good Curé Monsieur Peyramale, too, never lost sight of them, and stood to them in place of a second father.

"I thank you with all my heart," she wrote to him, "for your kindness in recommending my youngest brother to the Bishop's attention. He was really a source of grave preoccupation to me since the loss of my poor parents.

"I am now quite happy about him, Monsieur le Curé, since the reception of your letter, in which you are good enough to tell me to have no further apprehensions on his behalf, and that you will in your goodness watch over all my dear ones. I am, henceforth, perfectly at rest in so far as they are concerned.

"I beg you to accept my heartfelt thanks for all the

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favours which you have never ceased to bestow upon myself and the members of my family.

“Daily I beseech Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin to reward your charity.”

The following is an extract from a letter addressed by Sister Marie-Bernard to the Bishop of Tarbes:

“Permit me, poor little Sister as I am, to express my lively gratitude to Your Lordship for having undertaken the education of my youngest brother. His future has been a matter of deep concern to me since I had the misfortune to lose my beloved parents.

“I have never ceased to think of my dear little orphan and wonder what would become of him, and I have prayed unceasingly to God and the Blessed Virgin to watch over and protect him.

“Never does one invoke the Most Holy Virgin in vain under her title of ‘Mother of the orphans’ What better proof could I desire than the paternal solicitude and delicate charity which you have bestowed upon my beloved brother? What a blessing for him that you should deign to provide for his education and his future! What a consolation for me to know that he is under your care!

“As long as I live, Monseigneur, I shall never cease to render thanks to God and Our Blessed Lady for this signal favour. Especially do I beseech the best of Mothers to repay a hundredfold the debt of gratitude which I and my family owe to Your Lordship.”

Sister Marie-Bernard’s gratitude was equally lively for all the services rendered to her family in religion. In 1874 the Sisters of Nevers had established at Lourdes an orphanage for poor children, almost opposite the Grotto, and only separated from it by the Gave.

Sister Marie-Bernard wrote upon this subject a letter to the Curé, Mgr. Peyramale, from which we extract the following:

“Our beloved Orphanage, according to all accounts,

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occupies a prominent place in your affections, and it seems that you have constituted yourself general provider to the institution, going so far as to supply it with firewood. Knowing the depth of your charity, this does not surprise me. I have myself been too often the object of your fatherly solicitude, to doubt that you would extend it with equal charity to these poor little orphans. I was sure from the first that they would find in you a true father.

"I was rejoiced, Monseigneur, to learn that the construction of your new church is well advanced. I never forget the little prayer that I promised to say every day for your intention. May I presume to ask you, in return, to say a '*Hail Maru*' whenever you visit my beloved Grotto; I need it badly."

When she received the news of the death of this faithful servant of Mary, Sister Marie-Bernard repaired to the chapel and poured out her prayers and tears before the altar.

On September 15th, 1877, she wrote to the Abbé Pomian, Chaplain of the Hospital, who had been her confessor whilst she was at Lourdes, and had prepared her for her first communion, as follows:

"The sudden death of our beloved and venerable Curé has quite overwhelmed me. What an immense loss for the inhabitants of Lourdes! They would be indeed ungrateful if they failed to recognise in the death of their holy pastor a life sacrificed to a consuming zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. It would seem that the difficulties he encountered in the building of his new church had much to do with his untimely death. I should not be surprised if this were the case, he was so eager to ensure the success of the work which, thanks to his efforts, had been so well commenced. We can only adore the holy will of God, without whose permission nothing can happen.

"It was on the Feast of the Nativity of the Our

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Blessed Lady that I received the terrible news. At nine o'clock Sister Nathalie came to look for me in the tribune and told me that a telegram had just arrived announcing that the Curé was at death's door. The next morning another arrived to say that he was dead. I could not possibly express to you how much I suffered! Great as was my grief, my consolation was no less great in learning that our much beloved and regretted Curé was privileged to receive the Last Sacraments in full possession of his faculties, assisted at his last moments, by yourself, M^{onsieur} l'Abbé, his bosom friend, his faithful and pious colleague.

"The Blessed Virgin came to call him hence on the Feast of the Nativity, a fitting reward for all the sacrifices and trials he valiantly supported for love of her.

"I can well imagine, M^{onsieur} l'Abbé, the profound sorrow in to which you have been plunged by the sudden and unexpected death of our worthy Pastor. The greatness of your loss can only be measured by the depth of veneration and respect you felt for him. The only possible mitigation of our sorrow we must seek in the reflection that we have gained an additionnal protector in heaven."

Sister Marie-Bernard never forgot a single person who did her the slightest service or tended her in her sufferings. One of the Sisters stationed not far from Nevers came one day to pass a few hours at the Mother-House. "So here you are," was Sister Marie-Bernard's greeting. "I had a presentiment that you would come to-day. Oh! how often I pray for you; I have more than one good reason for doing so, for did we not receive the religious habit together and make our solemn profession on the same day, and did you not nurse me when I was ill? How could I ever cease to remember you?"

This is a fitting place to speak of that charity, that "fraternal love," which showed itself in her, under

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all its forms. I might even say clothed in all its charms; for it was nothing less than the revelation and reproduction of the life of Jesus in her soul.

We have seen how compassionate she was for her patients in the infirmary, how anxious to give the least possible trouble to her companions.

During the course of one of her long and painful attacks, she noticed that the Sister who spent the night in her room was unable to sleep, so great was her anxiety. She was greatly troubled, for she hated to think that anyone should be deprived of their night's rest on her account. She accordingly begged her Superiors to remove the Sister in question, and put in her place a nurse who was a heavier sleeper, and would not be kept awake by her sufferings.

"Make yourself comfortable in this arm-chair," said she to another Sister who was sitting up with her. "I promise to call you if I want you."

To another, "Don't make such a fuss about me; very likely you need nursing more than I do."

She loved to encourage, console, reprove even at need, and always with such simplicity and modesty that unconsciously she diffused around her the sweet savour of Christ, full of strength and sweetness.

"When the opportunity occurs," said she, "we must, like Our Saviour, know how to pour oil and wine into the wayfarer's wounds, without respect of persons and, like Himself, succouring for preference the poorest, the most suffering, the humblest and most abandoned."

A religious relates that, whilst still a novice, she was one day on duty in the infirmary, attending a sufferer. She was greatly depressed, and her eyes were full of tears. Sister Marie-Bernard, who, in her opinion, was often gifted with an extraordinary insight, was not long in seeing that she was in trouble, and asked her what was grieving her. She replied that, as the result of a childish prank of which she had

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been guilty, one of the aged Sisters had told her that she would never be fit to become a religious. Sister Marie-Bernard smiled and paused a moment, then looking her in the face said:

"Since your one desire is to do the will of God, you will surely be a Sister of Nevers; don't be distressed, but accustom yourself to bear these little crosses." Immediately all her fears were dissipated, and as she says: "I have since had the happiness of becoming Bernadette's sister in religion. I still have to bear 'the little crosses,' but how light they are when one has the assistance of our Blessed Lord."

"I was very prone to discouragement," says another religious who had known Sister Marie-Bernard at Lourdes, "and confided my troubles to her. 'Don't be so despondant' was her reply. 'I will pray for you.' Since then I have often experienced the efficacy of her prayer. Whenever I am sad, I invoke her and never without feeling immediately the benefit of her intercession.

"When I had been professed, and was kissing her at the moment of my departure from the Mother-House, I cried, 'Good-bye.' She replied, 'Let us kiss each other for the last time here below'; and as a matter of fact, I never saw her again.

"I have still in my ears the pious recommendations she made me in parting: *Welcome sickness as a special mark of favour from your Divine Spouse; devote yourself to the service of the poor, but always with holy prudence; never give way to discouragement; cultivate a deep love for the Blessed Virgin.* Be sure that you will always have the benefit of my prayers, and let us remember one another every day at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.' "

Two or three weeks after her entry into the Novitiate, a new postulant was on duty in the infirmary at the bedside of a dying Sister. To quote her own

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words: "I saw a religious whom I did not know enter softly and stand at the sufferer's side. Claspings her hands, she exclaimed with heavenly fervour: 'Dear Sister, what happiness awaits you! A few more hours of suffering and you will receive your reward. You will gaze upon the Sacred Heart and the Blessed Virgin.' She added other words of consolation, which I do not remember, with such a depth of expression that I was amazed and edified beyond description. I wondered who she was, and it was only later that I learnt that my unknown assistant was Bernadette of Lourdes, the privileged Child of Mary."

Sister Marie-Bernard always sought with pious zeal to promote the spiritual welfare of souls. One day, meeting a postulant in the cloister, she drew her to one side and said: "Mademoiselle, you are not sufficiently recollected; on the contrary, you are inclined to be frivolous; what makes you laugh in the refectory? You know that you are doing wrong." Delighted at being favoured with this unlooked for occasion of seeing and speaking personally with Sister Marie-Bernard, the young postulant made the open declaration that it was her joy at finding herself opposite to her in the refectory, which was the cause of her exhibitions of hilarity, and added: "Please pray for my amendment." The promise was given, and from that day forth the young postulant avoided all exterior manifestations of amusement during silence.

The sick, the suffering, and the orphan, held the first place in her heart. "*How favoured you are in being sent to care for the poor and miserable,*" said she to a Sister who was leaving, by order of her Superiors, to devote herself to nursing in a hospital. "*I should so much have liked to do so! God had other designs for me; after all I only desire His Holy Will.*"

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To another Sister she said: *"Learn to love your little orphans; do all you can to make them comfortable, and above all teach them to love God."*

She was very literally one of those souls whom the love of Christ expands and whose life is a complete realisation of the divine words at the Last Supper: "Love one another." When it was her lot to suffer from the conduct of those around her, which often happened, as we shall see further on, not only did she never complain, but she would have been indignant had anyone sought to console her by throwing the blame on the shoulders of a third person, no matter who. All those who had the privilege of knowing her are unanimous in testifying that she was never found wanting in holy charity, even to the extent of a mere word of criticism. To ask a service of her was to cause her a real satisfaction; she would perform it with the most charming good grace.

Her soul was as transparent as crystal; her nature essentially upright; she was incapable of tolerating a subterfuge, but, nevertheless, endowed with the greatest prudence and discretion. She spoke with sobriety and brevity, but whatever she said bore the mark of good sense and judgment. No matter what question was put to her she was never at a loss for an appropriate answer, and was unequalled in her capacity for "answering a fool, according to his folly."

Upon learning that she had been accused in certain quarters of having divulged the secrets committed to her by the Blessed Virgin, she denied the charge energetically, adding: *"Never have I breathed a word of them to anybody. The Lady of the Vision entrusted three secrets to me; I have preserved them faithfully. She also taught me a prayer, which I repeat every day. No one but myself knows what it is."*

Notwithstanding her reserve, she diffused around

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her an atmosphere of brightness, thanks to her lovable simplicity and childlike gaiety.

"How favoured you were to see the Blessed Virgin," remarked one of the nuns, a cousin of her own. "*But you, my dear friend,*" she replied, "*were present at the Apparitions, why did you not keep your eyes open? Never mind! you will see her in heaven, for I am sure you will be a fervent religious.*"

One day, when she was being besieged with questions about details of the Blessed Virgin's garments, she remarked: "I never said that her dress was of *tulle*. I may have said that it looked like *tulle*, but in reality it was made of a fabric that I have never seen elsewhere."

Then, with a knowing twinkle in her eye, she added: "*I can't help it; if people are not satisfied, and want to know exactly what she looked like, there is only one thing for them to do; get her to come back again, so that they can see for themselves!*"

The little shepherdess of Bartrès, taught by the Queen of Heaven, had felt her soul open by degrees to an comprehension of all the mysteries of the supernatural life, and as if to render her action on her child more unmistakable, Mary permitted her, independent of outside instruction, to exhibit proficiency in various capacities. She showed herself to be an excellent nurse and an accomplished needlewoman, turning out work of extraordinary delicacy, the reputation of which in some unascertained manner spread beyond the convent walls.

A lady of Nevers arrived one day at the Mother-House in great distress, saying that her little boy was seriously ill. She brought with her a child's counterpane in crochet work, only just commenced, and expressed her firm persuasion that if "Bernadette" were to finish the work her child would recover. The Sister doorkeeper, with the Mother-General's consent,

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carried it up to the infirmary and, addressing all the Sisters present, said in a tone of enquiry:

"Madame X has just brought us this counterpane; I fancy she has made a mess of it, and she wants to know if one of you could not put it to rights for her." Thereupon, as if by accident, she handed the article to Sister Marie-Bernard, who remarked smiling:

"That's just like these fine ladies; they tangle up their work, and then come to us to sort it out for them. Never mind! give it me all the same; I'll try to put it straight." She finished it. The counterpane was laid upon the child, who speedily recovered.

In addition to heavy work of this kind, she produced many trifles which enabled her Superiors to present to friends and benefactors of the Community little souvenirs of "Bernadette's" handiwork.

They welcomed them as if they were treasures of untold value. At Easter time she would decorate painted eggs with the most charming designs, obtaining her effects by the simple expedient of scraping off as much of the colour as was necessary to leave her pattern in relief. She was greatly amused at the tributes paid to her artistic skill. "How pretty these eggs are!" said the recipients. "Do you think so?" was her reply. "Well after all, I can get to heaven just as easily by *scraping eggs as by any other means.*"

One of her occupations was to colour Sacred-Hearts on images of piety, and she would say to her companions: "If anyone tells you that I have no heart, you can assure them that I pass the whole day in manufacturing nothing else but hearts."

In recreation-time, when she found herself alone, her favourite distraction, and a very pious one as we shall see, was to endeavour to form acrostics with the names of Jesus and Mary and St. Bernard. Unlettered as she was, she found means to range the virtues in such an order that their initials formed the holy names. Thus:

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J—oy	M—ortification
E—nergy	A—ffection
S—uffering	R—egularity
U—nion	I—nnocence
S—ubmission	A—bandonment

“During my novitiate,” relates another religious, “our Mother-Mistress told me to paint an Infant Jesus in a heart. I pleaded my incapacity to execute this miniature, but she was inexorable. The idea occurred to me to go and seek Sister Marie-Bernard’s advice.

“‘Just fancy’, said I, ‘our Mistress has insisted on my painting an Infant Jesus, and I don’t even know how to begin.’ ‘You can’t possibly want me to do it,’ was her reply. ‘I should make a worse job of it than you.’ ‘No, but whilst I try, you might say a “*Hail Mary*.”’ ‘Oh! if that is all you want, it is easily done.’

“I went to work, and as soon as I began to ply my pencil on the card that I had to illuminate, Sister Marie-Bernard began to implore the Blessed Virgin’s assistance. I seemed to work as by a miracle, the head of the Infant Jesus was exquisite and the whole miniature so successful that when I carried it to our Mother-Mistress, she scolded me, thinking that I had only made difficulties in the first place from self-conceit, and in order to win admiration for my talent. I did not fail to explain to her what had happened. I found out afterwards that she had sent my card to her mother. Never afterwards did I succeed in producing anything equal to it.”

Thus the humble religious put into practice the maxim of a mystic writer: “Every Christian should be as a flower exhaling a sweet perfume to rejoice his brethren.” Or again, as says St. Paul: “Let everyone of you please his neighbour unto good, to edification.”¹

¹Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans, xv. 2.

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But Sister Marie-Bernard rose still higher: by her prayers she enlightened and conquered souls. At Massabielle she had heard these words coming direct from the heart of the Divine Mother: "*Pray for all sinners.*" Thenceforward, it was her chief preoccupation.¹

At Lourdes, when some one remarked: "What a humiliation it was for you to kneel down and kiss the earth!" she replied promptly, in accents full of compassion: "Oh! how can you say so when you think that I did it *for all poor sinners!*"

On another occasion, when she was still at Lourdes, a stranger, who was visiting the town as a sightseer, impelled by curiosity, presented himself at the door of the Hospital and asked to be allowed to see Bernadette herself who opened to him, and replied simply, "I am Bernadette"; whereupon the visitor addressed her as follows :

"Ah! then it is you who are supposed to have seen the Blessed Virgin,—a fine lot of yarns you have spun about it: all the same tell me what you really saw."

"What good would it be for me to do so, since you do not believe in the story."

"Never mind! show me what she looked like when she smiled: I am a sinner and, who knows, it might convert me."

"A smile like hers can only be seen in heaven. Nevertheless, since you say *you are a sinner*, I will try."

Thereupon she smiled, raising her eyes to heaven. The stranger was so affected by her smile that his heart was touched, and to such a degree that he was

¹The members of her family in religion have perpetuated this mission as a pious heritage. In order to fulfil the injunction of the Blessed Virgin a "Confraternity of Prayer for the conversion of sinners through the intercession of Our Lady of Lourdes" was canonically established in the public chapel of the Mother-House at Nevers, on the 30th June, 1911.

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impelled to visit the Grotto, where he fell on his knees and was converted.

One of her friends at Lourdes¹ relates how she herself was a witness of a conversion effected by the mere sight of Bernadette. "It was in 1862; we had a family of English people—Catholics—staying at the hotel. Their man-servant, a Catholic himself, was married to an Irish Protestant. The husband, a fervent believer, desiring above all things the conversion of his wife, went immediately upon his arrival at Lourdes to see Bernadette, and asked her prayers to this end. He had previously told me of his desire and asked my prayers for the same intention. One day he came to introduce his wife to me. She was a charming person, very ladylike, and had apparently received an education superior to her station.

"Having made her acquaintance, I invited her to walk to the Grotto with myself and the servants. She made no difficulty about accepting my invitation. When we arrived at the sacred rock, we all knelt in prayer except herself. I purposely appeared to take no notice of her attitude, but when we were on the point of leaving, I offered her some of the water to drink. She refused politely, whereupon I said: 'If you do not care to drink, at least dip your finger in it and make the sign of the cross.'

" 'Please do not insist,' she replied; 'for I should be sorry to have to refuse a second time.'

"These words were spoken with such decision that I thought it prudent to press the matter no further.

"On our way home we were caught in a terrible thunderstorm; the rain fell in torrents, and we could find no shelter, for, at the time of which I write, there were no houses on the road leading to the Grotto.

¹Mademoiselle Elfrida Lacrampe, who remained incredulous and even sceptical up to the moment when the authenticity of the Apparitions appeared clearly established. The incident is taken from her own manuscript notes.

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'Madame J.,' said I, 'you will be the recipient of a shower of graces no less abundant than the rain which is now falling upon us.' I was then bold enough to tackle the religious question, and reproached her gently for having refused to drink at the Grotto and even to make the sign of the cross. After having raised sundry objections, she added: 'Made-moiselle, I am seeking for light. I promise you that when I see it, I will not voluntarily shut my eyes.'

"On the following day it was commonly reported in town that Bernadette was at the point of death and that she had already received the Last Sacraments. As I desired intensely that Madame J. should see her, I proposed that she should accompany me to the Hospital to pay her a visit. She refused absolutely to do so, saying: 'I have not the slightest desire to see Bernadette; she may be already dead, and, what is more, I have no time to spare; I have to leave almost immediately for Pau.'

"'You may have no desire to see Bernadette,' I replied, 'but I have no hesitation in telling you that I am extremely anxious for you to do so; if you wish to do me a favour, you will consent to accompany me.'

"Her natural politeness, or perhaps it would be wiser to say the grace of God, got the better of her opposition and we set out for the Hospital with her husband.

"The patient had been strictly forbidden to receive visitors, but the dear Sisters had not the heart to turn me away. We reached the dormitory at the very moment when Bernadette was seized with a dreadful spasm.

"Two Sisters were supporting her and she had every appearance of being on the point of death, for she could no longer breathe. 'Come', said Madame J., 'let us go, you can see very well that she is no longer in a condition to speak.' 'No matter,' said I, 'if we cannot speak to her, we can at least see her.'

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So saying, I led her to the foot of the sufferer's bed, where she remained as if rooted to the spot.

"As soon as Bernadette was a little recovered, I went and kissed her. As I left her side, I saw my friend spring forwards and throw herself on her knees at Bernadette's side. There she burst into tears, burying her face in her hands as if she were ashamed to betray her emotion.

"Bernadette, who up to that moment had said nothing, turned her head and said encouragingly: 'Oh! Madame, please get up and stop crying; I cannot bear to see you so distressed.'

"I drew up a chair and begged Madame J. to take it, which she did, covering her face with her hands and continuing to weep bitterly.

"*'I should love,'* said Bernadette, *'to give your friend a little souvenir; pass me my crucifix and my medals: Now make her choose what she would prefer.'* My poor friend, distracted with grief, had paid no attention to what had been said. *'Madame,'* said I, *'Bernadette wishes to give you a souvenir and asks you to choose the object you wish.'* She rose abruptly, and falling again upon her knees, exclaimed: *'No! No! I want nothing; I don't deserve anything; I am not worthy of it.'* *'Surely,'* said I, *'you do not desire to hurt her feelings by refusing what she is so glad to offer you.'* *'If I must accept,'* she replied, *'let her choose for me.'*

"Bernadette selected a cross and a medal, and with a tenderness that no words can render, added: *'The cross is for you, Madame; the medal is to remind you constantly of me.'*

"My friend's tears and sobs began afresh. Taking advantage of her deep emotion I reminded her of her words of the day before. *'You are seeking light, it is now shining clearly before your eyes; do not close them, but open your heart to the action of grace which has so markedly singled you out. Yesterday*

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you refused to join with me in prayer; will you now consent to go down to the chapel with the Sisters? We are all going to pray for you.' 'Ah! Mademoiselle,' was her reply, 'I can refuse you nothing: I am ready to do whatever you wish.'

"We took leave of Bernadette, who was greatly affected; the poor child did not suspect what God had accomplished through her agency .

"Not long after the young Irishwoman abjured Protestantism and became a fervent Catholic. Two years later God called her to Himself.

"In heaven, where she now is, she must bless the day which witnessed her meeting with Bernadette on earth, for it is certain that God employed the favourite Child of Mary as the instrument of her conversion."

Every day Sister Marie-Bernard made it her practice to pray for souls who had wandered from the truth, and begged her Sisters in religion to do the same.

"*The Blessed Virgin insisted so much on the necessity of praying for these souls,*" she would say, and, remembering how much more efficacious prayer is when accompanied by sacrifice, would add: "Perhaps we do not mortify ourselves sufficiently: let us try to do so more."

When she was asked to swallow a particularly nauseous potion, as often was the case, she would remark while complying: "*For the salvation of a great sinner.*"

"And who is he, your great sinner?" she would be asked.

"*Oh! the Blessed Virgin knows very well who he is,*" she would reply.

In 1870, the Sisters of Nevers, who were divided throughout the four Foundations in Paris, obtained the Superior General's authorisation to remain at their post during the two sieges. They considered

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this to be the highest privilege which could have been accorded them. They were inspired by the hope of shedding their blood for God, or at least of dying martyrs to their charity. Day and night, forgetful of themselves, they dressed the sores of the wounded, tended the sick and consoled the dying, speaking to them of God and of Jesus Christ, who died to redeem them. How could these sufferers remain untouched by their accents of faith, and the living example of their charity, or fail to make a Christian end? What they accomplished in Paris they never failed to repeat wherever their services were called for, and the divine protection was extended to them in a very visible manner.

Many of their number fell at the post of honour whilst nursing soldiers suffering from small-pox and typhus, gaining triumphantly the martyr's crown—victims of their indefatigable zeal.¹

Sister Marie-Bernard followed with aching heart the national reverses and mourning. She poured out her soul in prayer and sacrifice. On the evening of October 24th, 1870, an extraordinary phenomenon was witnessed in the sky; the entire horizon was aflame, the heavens were like a sea of blood. The whole Community was out of doors observing this unwonted spectacle. Suddenly Sister Marie-Bernard lowered her eyes full of grief and foreknowledge, and murmured softly in accents of sorrow and compassion:

“Even now they will not turn to God!”

Considering this disastrous war as a judgment upon her country, she wrote to her father: “It seems to me that the Prussians are only doing their duty,” meaning thereby that their mission was to chastise this unhappy land, nominally the eldest daughter of

¹“Coup d'œil historique sur l'institut des Sœurs de Nevers,” by Marcel Bouix, S.J.

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the Church, but officially at least no longer her champion. "*God requires victims*," she repeated. They were not wanting; all the world knows how the Papal Zouaves were massacred on the field of Loigny.

Who has not since read the touching pages consecrated to the life of General de Sonis? Who has not learnt with emotion how during the long night succeeding the battle, as the illustrious commander lay helpless on the blood-stained ground, Our Lady of Lourdes appeared to her beloved child and servant, and filled his soul to overflowing with unspeakable happiness? Those terrible hours were transformed into hours of rapture. In spite of his fearful wounds (one of his legs had been shattered and the other frozen), the horrors of that night of terror and of blood, his atrocious mental sufferings, his physical tortures, were alike banished up to the moment when aid first reached him. Mary, speaking by the mouth of her servant, poured consolation into the souls of the young Zouaves who, though wounded, dragged themselves to their general's side and begged him to speak to them of God, of death, and of the eternal hope.

The Immaculate Virgin was the only subject of their conversation. She herself illumined with her love that night of agony.

Paris too had its victims: we all know the history of the martyrs of the Commune. There again we find the Immaculate Virgin in their midst. She made choice of two out of their number, whom she delivered from the destroyer; both were destined to become Bishops of Tarbes and guardians of the Sanctuary of Lourdes: Mgr. Jourdan and Mgr. Schoepfer. How can we despair when we see beloved image shine like a star in the night of our national mourning and disaster, when we see on all sides the evidence of the maternal intervention of the Virgin all-powerful, the Virgin of Massabielle?

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"The Prussians are at our gates," said the Chevalier Gougenot des Mousseaux to Bernadette, "are you not afraid of them?"

"Not in the least."

"Then you think there is nothing to fear!"

"I am only afraid of bad Catholics."

"Of nothing else?"

"Of nothing else, Monsieur."

So much for Bernadette's political opinions! Blessed Joan of Arc and St. Genevieve shared them. How great and powerful would our nation become if it had the good sense to follow the political instincts of its shepherdesses!

From a letter of Sister Marie-Bernard to the Superior of the Hospital at Lourdes, we quote the following: "How much reason we have for sorrow when we see our beloved France so hard-hearted and blind. How offended Our Lord must be! Pray incessantly for poor sinners, that they may be converted. After all they are our brethren; let us beseech Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin to transform these wolves into lambs."

From a letter to her sister Marie: "We can only do one thing: pray fervently to the Blessed Virgin to intercede for us with her Son, and obtain for us mercy and forgiveness. I have a firm belief that God's judgment, which is weighing heavily upon us at this moment, will be lightened by the intercession of the Mother of Pity."

Her soul rising above all earthly considerations was consumed with the love of God. It was the breath of life to her, the motive of every action, the inspiration and support of every effort. It was in order to testify her love to her Divine Master, and to be in perpetual contact with Him, that she sacrificed herself to the strict observance of her Rule. All the Sisters who knew her intimately, who passed months with her in the infirmary, affirm positively that they

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never knew her to infringe the rule of silence. She observed faithfully the most minute prescriptions, knowing that every one, however trivial it might seem, represented, in so far as she was concerned, the will of God, and penetrated by this conviction she studied them lovingly and strove to make them an integral part of her daily life. Happy are the souls who seek to establish this ceaseless relationship with God. By so doing they attain by degrees to that blessed transfiguration which is the crown of the religious life.

Sister Marie-Bernard never took advantage of her infirmities to ask for a dispensation from the strict observance of her Rule. Even when pinned to her bed of suffering she would assist spiritually at all the exercises of the Community. No sooner did the bell ring for prayer or meditation than she would sit upright in bed, seize her crucifix and remain absorbed in prayer till the end of the time appointed for these devotions. She made a serious preparation for them beforehand by recollection and interior silence, as her private notes prove. It was moved by charity alone that she would, on occasion, speak to the persons who came to visit her in the infirmary. No sooner had they left her than it was evident what happiness she felt in relapsing into silence, and in so doing she was often heard to murmur: "*God alone! God alone!*"

Deprived, as she was, especially during the last years of her life, of the blessing of assisting at the Holy Sacrifice, she took a particular pleasure in assisting spiritually at all the masses in course of celebration throughout the world. This she did by means of an engraving representing the continuity of the Eucharistic sacrifice, following the succession of night to day in both hemispheres.

"I only regret," she would say, "that my little acolyte never rings his bell."



Sister Mary Bernard, at the age of 28

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As long as her strength permitted she made the Stations of the Cross every day for the beloved souls in Purgatory, whom she never ceased to recommend to the prayers of her sisters in religion. She nourished her love by meditation upon the sufferings of Our Lord.

She loved to read the passion in the pages of the Holy Evangelists, preferring their simplicity to more elaborate paraphrases: "*The simple Gospel story affects me more,*" she would say.

Forgetfulness of self increased her union with God. Inspired by divine love, she made the resolution. "*Always to do what cost her the most. Never to give way to discouragement, always to recognise the Holy Will of God in whatever might befall her; to thank Him for everything, knowing that it was for her good that all things were permitted; to strive to be indifferent¹ to whatever her companions or Superiors might think of her; to cultivate detachment from all things, in order to seek to please God and save her soul; continually to bear in mind that God alone is good, and that it was from Him only she hoped for her reward.*"

During the retreat made in 1875 her confessor, the Reverend Father Douce², exhorted her "to be prepared to accept lovingly all the crosses and sufferings, whether corporal or spiritual, which God might see fit to send her during the year—to remember that love meant suffering alone in union with Jesus and Mary, to embrace it in expiation of her own sins and those

¹Meaning that holy indifference, which consists in abandoning all things to the Will of God, in a spirit of Faith and forgetfulness of self.

²Father Douce of the Society of Mary, was chaplain of the Mother-House and Novitiate from Sept. 20, 1865, to Sept. 27, 1876. He himself expired in the odour of sanctity, and from his private notes we learn that he had an exalted opinion of the holiness of Sister Marie-Bernard. He does not hesitate to invoke her and render thanks to her in terms which, as it has been remarked, he only employed in the case of those already approved by the Church, such as Saint Margaret-Mary Alacoque and Saint Jean Vianney, Curé d'Ars.

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of many others; above all, to do and suffer everything with holy confidence."

Instinctively her soul answers: *"Oh! Mary, Blessed Mother, grant that love may hallow my every action and suffering!*

"My God, I promise Thee, with the assistance of Thy grace to show my love for Thee, by accepting without a murmur the trials and disappointments Thou mayest see well to send me, whether due to my Superiors or my companions, or even to the Evil one himself.

"Oh! Jesus, make me realise more fully the jealousy of divine love. Detach my affections from the creature, raise them up and bind them to Thyself.

"It has been said of a holy religious that he died of love: what would I not give to do likewise!

"At least let me accept with joy, privations, sufferings and humiliations, like Jesus and Mary, for the glory of God.

"Let me show a special affection for those who may have been a cause of mortification to me, not from love for the persons themselves, but for the love of Our Lord."

Thus we see Sister Marie-Bernard's whole existence was directed to a more perfect love of God.

In this lay the secret of her virtues and heroic obedience.

The single fact of her perpetual silence upon the subject of the Apparitions at Lourdes, those opened heavens from which she had heard the voice of Mary, is sufficient to fill us with admiration. She was, nevertheless, full of these holy memories: a word written by her to the Sisters of Lourdes is sufficient evidence of her ceaseless preoccupation:

"Pray for me whenever you go to the Grotto. My heart is there, attached to the rock I loved so well."

Her companions were eager to question her; but,

like her Blessed Mother at Nazareth, she said nothing, and kept all these words in her heart.

One day at recreation-time, she was listening to one of her companions who was telling how a certain religious, having been favoured with an apparition of the Infant Jesus, was disturbed in the midst of her rapture by the convent bell calling her to assist at one of the exercises of the Community. Without a moment's hesitation she obeyed the summons addressed to her in virtue of holy obedience. Each of the listeners described what she would have done in similar circumstances, all being unanimous in their admiration of the heroic conduct of the religious in question. "And you, Sister Marie-Bernard," they asked, "what would you have done?" "Oh! in her place," she replied promptly, "I should have acted differently." Her companions astonished, waited to hear what would follow. "I should have obeyed the summons immediately like her," she added, "but I should not have left the Infant Jesus behind. I should have taken Him with me. He was so small that He could not have been heavy to carry."

The first part of Sister Marie-Bernard's reply astonished her companions, for they knew with what minuteness she practised the virtue of obedience, as exemplified in her most insignificant actions.

She had, on a certain occasion, received permission to present sacred pictures to two of her companions, but refused to sign them, even with the initials of her name, because she had not been expressly authorised to do so. She would only make a scratch on them with her nail in the form of a cross.

The general public will doubtless only find food for astonishment in perusing these details: but souls who are awake to the action of grace, those who recognise its appeals, know what heroism is required to bend so unreservedly to the Divine Will.

The spirit of faith and love, which was the main-

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spring of Sister Marie-Bernard's life, could not fail to penetrate to the exterior, and, without her being aware of it, edify all around her.

The religious admired her way of making the sign of the cross and were in the habit of saying: "It is evident that the Blessed Virgin taught her how to make it." At a much earlier date, Monsieur Estrade, one of the witnesses of the Apparitions, had exclaimed: "If they make the sign of the cross in heaven it must be just as she does."

Her recollection was profound. When absorbed in prayer, and especially when making visits to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, she was in the habit of burying her face in her veil in order to isolate herself from all her surroundings:

"I make a little sanctuary for myself," she would say. The ardent love which animated her soul was visible in her face, especially after having received Holy Communion.

Her features were illumined, her eyes often bathed in tears, her whole physiognomy transfigured. She would remain indefinitely wrapped in her acts of thanksgiving.

One Christmas night, after midnight Mass, when all had as usual retired to rest, a solitary Sister remained motionless in her place. She seemed so lost in God that the Sister whose duty it was to close the chapel had not the courage to interrupt her prayer. After a long interval she rose, surprised at finding herself alone, and crept on tip-toe to her cell, doing her best to avoid being seen. It was Sister Marie-Bernard.

The Divine Master seemed to take pleasure in exalting the humility and love of His little servant. On numerous occasions during her life in religion she seems to have been favoured with the gift of prophecy. This was particularly evident in her predictions of the date of her death.

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One of her companions, having been sent by the Novice-Mistress to enquire after her health (she was at the moment confined to the infirmary), her reply was: "Tell her not to be anxious about me, I shall not die to-day or for a long time yet." This occurred in 1870, nine years before her death.

In 1873 a party of novices obtained permission to go and see her in the infirmary, where she was confined by an attack of asthma. One of their number, full of health and strength, asked her whether she was afraid to die. When she replied in the negative, the same novice added: With such fits of suffocation as you have, it would be no wonder if one of them were to carry you off." "Nonsense, you will die before me," was Sister Marie-Bernard's reply. A few months later this novice, who had been sent to one of the Houses in the South of France, died of a sudden chill.

Towards the end of her life she said to one of her nurses, who was continually coming to her bedside to see how she was getting on: "Don't be continually disturbing yourself like that; you think I am going to die, but as a matter of fact I have more than another six months to live yet."

One of the Novice-Mistresses, Sister Ursula Millien—according to an anecdote related by a religious who was personally a witness of the occurrence—brought a group of postulants to make Sister Marie-Bernard's acquaintance. The latter seemed to regard one of their number with very special attention, so much so that they did not like to ask her reasons for doing so until after the postulants had withdrawn. "She is not fit to leave her mother yet," was the reply. A few days after the postulant left the Novitiate.

In 1870 the Superior of the Hospital of Villefranche, who had come to the Mother-House to make her retreat, was in great anxiety; the water-supply of the Hospital had given out. A spring had been sought

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for, but in vain. She asked the prayers of Sister Marie-Bernard. "Set your mind at rest," she replied, the spring will be found in due course." Hardly had the Superior regained her Community when the longed-for water was discovered.

"During my postulancy," writes a religious, "I received news that my mother was so ill that the doctors had little hope of saving her life. My sorrow upon learning this was increased by my reluctance to leave the Novitiate: but I was the eldest of a numerous family and my father insisted on my returning home.

"I was crying bitterly when I met Sister Marie-Bernard in the cloister. She accosted me and asked what was the cause of my grief. No sooner was she informed than she grasped my hands, endeavoured to console me, and, looking at me affectionately, said with an accent of conviction which I have never forgotten—although thirty-seven years have passed since: "Don't cry," Mademoiselle, the Blessed Virgin will heal her!" Two days later I received a letter saying: 'Your mother, who yesterday was at the point of death (the prayers for the dying had already been recited), is today absolutely cured, to the amazement of the doctors, who affirm that her sudden restoration to health is nothing less than miraculous.'

"It was subsequently established that her sudden recovery had taken place the very day that Sister Marie-Bernard had comforted me with the assurance that she would be spared to me.

"When I entered the Novitiate on October 24th, 1878," writes yet another religious, "I asked as a special favour to be allowed to see her whom the Immaculate Virgin had distinguished by the Apparitions. This privilege was granted me a few days later. Sister Marie-Bernard was working in the infirmary. I found her busy tinting sacred pictures and sketching the crown of thorns which encircles the Sacred Heart of Jesus. When she was informed that a

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newly-arrived postulant had come to ask her to intercede with the Most Holy Virgin for her final perseverance, she turned and gazed at me. Her face seemed to me to have retained some of the after-glow of the vision of Mary Immaculate, and I could not help being deeply impressed thereby.

“Addressing me, half in badinage, half in earnest, she said: ‘If you desire to be a good religious, Mademoiselle, you must learn to love suffering. Our Lord gives a crown of thorns to His friends on earth: do not look for anything better.’ Her words have remained engraved upon my memory: subsequent events have exemplified their truth and enabled me to grasp their full signification.”¹

Miraculous cures were not infrequently attributed to the prayers of the humble religious. A Sister says: “In 1878 I left my Community and returned to the Mother-House suffering from a severe affection of the lungs. All medical expedients were fruitless, and I had become a prey to the deepest discouragement when the idea occurred to me to ask Sister Marie-Bernard to unite with me in a novena. At the end of the novena there was a pronounced improvement in my condition. Ten days after I was sufficiently recovered to be able to return to my duties in a hospital.”

A Superior testifies that her sister was dying of typhoid fever. She begged Sister Marie-Bernard to pray for her recovery, and shortly after she received news that the sufferer was in full convalescence.

A Eudist religious informed the Reverend Mother General that a child afflicted with a species of leprosy had been cured as the result of a novena in which she

¹This religious became eventually a martyr to her charity. Having poisoned one of her fingers whilst dressing a wound, she underwent the amputation of her right hand and arm up to the elbow on June 21, 1905, in a hospital in the north of France, where she was engaged in nursing the sick.

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had requested the Community to join, and especially Sister Marie-Bernard, who at the moment was lying ill in the infirmary.

A young girl of La Charité-sur-Loire wrote that, suffering from an affection of the eyes, unamenable to all medical treatment, she had been cured by the application of a bandage which she had contrived to get Sister Marie-Bernard to touch, without her perceiving the innocent stratagem.

Another Sister writes: "I was witness of an occurrence at Lourdes in 1862 which I desire to relate. A gentleman and his wife arrived at the Hospital and begged the Superior to allow Bernadette to go out to the carriage where their invalid daughter was lying. She was returning from Cauterets, where she had taken the usual course of treatment without effect, and her recovery seemed hopeless. Her parents were convinced that if the Child of the Grotto were to touch her she would be cured. The Superior, yielding to their pious desire, said to Bernadette: 'Raise the young lady's head a little, and arrange her pillows.' She had hardly taken leave of them when the sick girl, feeling that she was cured, got up and stood erect on her feet, as if she had never had anything the matter with her."

We have gleaned from various sources and laid before the eyes of our readers the foregoing little incidents which each in its measure contributes to enhance the radiant virtues of Sister Marie-Bernard, "the religious." Let us now follow her in the exercise of her apostleship: it will soon be time to study her as a victim, "at the mercy of divine love, giving to God", in the words of a mystic writer, "not only satisfaction and honour, but also rejoicing."

IV

APOSTLESHIP

BERNADETTE," as a sacred orator has remarked, "rose from her knees and turned her face towards the nations, described what she had seen and repeated what she had heard: a whirlwind of prayer swept over the spiritual world, stirring and bending souls to its will. At the call of her voice, as at that of St. Dominic, crowds thronged to immerse their souls and renew their spiritual life in the waters of prayer and supplication. And what were the prayers that rose from these myriad throats?—the old and yet ever new—'*Our Father*' and '*Hail Mary*.'

"She has enabled us to come into closer contact with Christ: at Lourdes He lives and breathes in very earnest: He is loved with real love: life is lived for Him and for God alone."¹

And Pius X, the august Pontiff in whom the insight, the strength and the gentleness of Christ seem personified, Pius X, that is to say "Peter," "the representative of Almighty God here below, the earthly Word, the mouthpiece of the Most High upon earth, the voice whose range is universal,"² has declared that "*Bernadette has put the world on more intimate terms with the mystery of Christ Our Saviour.*"³

How exalted was the apostleship of this humble child!

She began it at the instance of Mary in the Grotto itself, and her first words were identical with those of

¹R. P. Janvier.

²Mgr. Berteaud, Bishop of Tulle.

³Pius X to Mgr. Schoepfer.

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St. John Baptist, the Precursor of Our Lord, on the banks of the Jordan: "Repent and do penance! Repent and to penance!"

She proclaimed this message to the crowds, and carrying them with her in a holy enthusiasm, prepared their souls to become the recipients of special graces, bidding them to *kiss the ground for the salvation of sinners*.

This token of affection, converted by Judas into an instrument of betrayal, was publicly consecrated by the Virgin's mouthpiece as a means of reparation.

We have already seen how apostolic zeal for the conversion of sinners was one of the dominant characteristics of her entire life.

Bernadette was a veritable apostle, when, in obedience to the Lady's wishes, she touched the ground and bade the fountain of grace spring forth; when, seeking her parish priest to convey to him the Heavenly Visitant's desire that "*a chapel should be built and that processions should be made to that chosen spot*," she laid the foundation of the magnificent apotheosis of Christ and His Mother, to which all the nations of the earth still contribute as participants and enthusiastic spectators.

Many a sacrifice was necessary before the desires of the Virgin of Massabielle could be fully realised.

"She issued her commands as a Sovereign. She desired to review her vassals at Lourdes, to distinguish the bravest amongst her followers. They counted all their sacrifices as nought and flocked to do her will."¹

When we study in detail the Apparitions, these manifestations to the world of the Immaculate Virgin, it is impossible to fail to recognise how completely the rôle of apostle was filled by Bernadette. She preaches the love of the rosary: it is the prayer which she recites upon her knees whilst awaiting the coming of

¹Abbé Archelet, Lourdes.

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the celestial Visitant; it is again the rosary which she repeats whilst rapt in ecstasy; it is the prayer that Mary herself seems to favour, for does she not appear holding her beads between her fingers like a weapon of salvation which she proffers to mankind.

On March 3rd, Mary does not appear; Bernadette's faith is in no wise shaken. She herself has promised to be at the Grotto every day for a fortnight. Although the rock may never again be lit up before her eyes, she will keep her word. By her faith she can claim the rank of an apostle.

In the midst of popular ovation she is wholly wrapped up in her Lady. After hours of spiritual rapture, of indescribable enthusiasm on the part of all those who witnessed these celestial manifestations, she returns without a murmur to the family circle and takes up her daily tasks—commonplace enough if unilluminated by the thought of God. She fulfils them in all simplicity, her soul full of graces already received and becoming by the very obscurity of her life more worthy of those which are still to follow. What an apostleship of humility, of hidden life, yet accessible to all of us, and full of dignity for those who know how to appreciate it aright!

The blessed candle which she burns before Our Lady is full of symbolical significance. "We ought, all of us, to be like candles offered to the Blessed Virgin, giving to souls within our immediate circle an example of spotless whiteness, rectitude and brightness, of slow, yet ceaseless and mystic, effacement."

Let us not burn for ourselves alone, or for creatures; "nor turn to base uses our illuminative powers," but make them profitable to the salvation of souls and the glory of God.

Let us make our own the following supplication addressed to the Holy Virgin: "Oh! Queen of Heaven, I desire only to burn for Christ and for Thee.

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Grant that I may remain white, upright, and shining like a candle upon the altar. And that I may be, as it were, inextinguishable, permit that my expiring flame may set light to other candles around me, to other souls. Thus when I have melted away in thy service upon earth, I shall at least leave behind me other points of light: like the candles great and small perpetually renewed under the arch of thy Grotto at Lourdes, so that their tiny flames, flickering in the breeze, may never cease to mount towards thy throne.”¹

How the apostleship of Bernadette was destined to spread and bear fruit! Her message, none other than that confided to her by the Immaculate Virgin, becomes “the most popular and persuasive means of evangelisation.” It goes straight to the heart full of the charm of an unearthly beauty. The truths which she announces, the obligations she imposes, the hopes she holds forth, are all embellished by the “smile of the Divine Mother—that Mother who is as good as she is great—great because God is with her, good because she lives solely to plead our cause in heaven.”²

Bernadette’s apostleship stirs the world to its foundations. She announces that Mary has appeared on earth. All creation thrills, awakens and prays. The Gave abandons its rocky bed without ceasing for a moment its hymn to the Eternal and to the Virgin whose feet have sanctified its banks. The hills are crowned with votive shrines; gold, marble, and precious stones combine to adorn the Sanctuary of the Queen of heaven.³

Bernadette herself seeks refuge in the shadow of the cloister, but her Bishop and the Superiors to

¹Abbé Archelet, Lourdes.

²Mgr. Izart.

³Monsieur Laserre and Father Cros.

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whom she has been confided by the Blessed Virgin present her willingly to all those who are entitled to question her. The Bishops, the Fathers of the Grotto, the historians of Our Lady of Lourdes examine her and record her testimony.

Up to the moment of her death, questions are addressed to her by post. Obedient to the commands of the Mother General, she dictates the answers, which are faithfully transmitted. Precisely because she desired to remain hidden, in order to place her testimony under the shield of the religious life, Bernadette became Sister Marie-Bernard, increasing its value and weight a hundredfold.

We will endeavour to resume in a few pages the world-wide influence of her voice, calling upon all men to pray and be made whole.

Already the much obstructed gorge, which lies between Lourdes and Pau, had been transformed by the upheavals consequent upon the construction of a railroad. Why all this display of engineering skill when a line presenting far fewer obstacles lay ready to hand?

It was Our Lady who inspired the choice. May she forgive us if we seek to penetrate the tender attentions of her maternal heart! In following the course adopted, all the pilgrims from the Bearn, the Basque country and Spain — not to speak of many others — were obliged to pass, close to the Madonna of Massabielle. They came to seek her shrine, and she was impatient to bestow upon them her smile and benediction.

It was in the month of June, 1867, that the line was opened to traffic for the first time. "Just before arriving at Lourdes the locomotive, climbing the steep ascent facing the Grotto, slackened its speed and seemed, with its column of steam shooting into the air, and the thunder of its wheels, to be offering the homage of its might and swiftness to the Suzerain

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of the spot, pledging itself to bear to her feet, for all time to come, a ceaseless and living tribute to her glory.¹

Very soon from all the points of the compass trains were hurrying thousands of pilgrims to the Sacred Grotto. The ocean itself was no obstacle to their enthusiasm. The childish voice of Bernadette sufficed to set the whole world in motion towards the land of miracle. What a mighty apostleship! What a never ending procession, worthy of Our Lady herself!

In the month of October, 1872, the hardly completed Basilica was the scene of a gathering of deputations from all parts of France. They came to gather around the Virgin of Massabielle, to implore her aid, to show their faith in her intercession, and to find new hope and courage kneeling at her feet. The whole nation was still smarting from the wounds inflicted by the war of 1870; *the vassals of Mary* came to implore healing from their Mother and their Queen. They were there to pray for the moral and material regeneration of her realm, "*Regnum Galliæ, Regnum Mariæ.*"

The principal French shrines dedicated to the Blessed Virgin had each sent a banner to be hung in the sanctuary as a tribute of their homage.

When the banner of Alsace passed in its turn, draped in black, the Prelate who presided at the ceremony, gathering up one of its folds, pressed it to his lips with reverence. The blood-stained severance of the two provinces was still a vivid reality to the minds of all those who were present: a patriotic thrill ran through the immense assembly and all eyes were filled with tears.

"Four years later the Basilica was consecrated and the statue of Our Lady of Lourdes solemnly crowned. Thirty-five Prelates, a Cardinal, three thousand

¹"Annales de N. D. de Lourdes," 2nd year.

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priests and a hundred thousand of the faithful assisted at this imposing ceremony. One must go far back into history to find a parallel to these immense throngs, piled up by a billow of enthusiasm, as the ocean heaps up the grains of sand upon its shores.”¹

Solemnities no less striking were witnessed in 1883 on the occasion of the Jubilee of the Apparitions, and the laying of the foundation stone of the Church of the Holy Rosary, and again in 1901 at its consecration. On this latter occasion the soul of ancient Gaul seemed stirred to its very depths, wakened and set in motion by divine grace. An immense body of clergy, comprising twenty-five Prelates, two Cardinals, a Patriarch, and the Papal Nuncio, offered to Mary the homage of the kneeling multitudes.

In 1908 followed the 50th Anniversary of the Apparitions, which was celebrated in such a way as to eclipse by the dignity and splendour of its ceremonies, as well as by the unexampled enthusiasm of the pilgrims who had flocked together for the occasion, the most memorable celebrations which Lourdes had hitherto witnessed. Full of truth was the saying: “That during the *triduum*, the words of David addressed to Jerusalem of old, might fitly be applied to the City of Mary transformed into a vision of peace. Joyful is their lot whose privilege it is to dwell within thy walls.”²

We refrain from enlarging upon the beauty, the magnificence and eloquence of the liturgical offices “in which the marvels of Massabielle received the seal of authenticity from the highest authority upon earth,”³ of those Matins beneath the dome of the Church of the Holy Rosary, where night was transformed into day by the brilliance of a thousand lights,

¹Abbé Bertin, “Histoire critique de Lourdes.”

²Canon Rousseil, “Les splendeurs de Lourdes.”

³Ibid.

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where in an atmosphere of poetry the Gregorian harmonies exercised their incomparable charm. We will also pass over the subject of the mighty offices and of those sacred lessons, prophetic or historic, in which are retraced all the celestial drama of the Grotto, and thanks to which by a signal privilege the hallowed terms "*Lourdes, le Gave, Massabielle, Bernadette*" are embodied in our native tongue in the immortal pages of the Catholic liturgy.¹

Henceforth, from century to century, all nations will repeat in the language of Gaul, mingled with the Church's own, the marvels Mary has wrought in our midst.

This sacred lyrism holds our souls and bears them aloft, till comes the moment when with a mighty burst of song the *Te Deum* rings forth.

It will be enough merely to refer to the Mass composed for the 50th anniversary by the Abbé Darros, the eminent musical Director of the Grotto, and which was sung by three hundred children of the soil. Others have sufficiently described its beauties, the supplication of the "*Kyrie*," the burst of praise at the "*Gloria*," the mysterious delicacy of the "*Sanctus*," the holy confidence of the "*Agnus*." It was the "*Credo*" of Dumont that became the vehicle for the profession of faith of the many thousands of pilgrims.

Such was the splendour of the ritual, the perfection of the music, the pomp of the ceremonies, both at the Holy Sacrifice and at the nightly Office, that it seemed as if "the choirs of the Heavenly Jerusalem had come down to the home of miracles" to sing the praises of the Queen, the Mother of Mercy, the sweet Virgin Mary.

It would be impossible, however, to avoid mention of the procession to the miraculous rock, at the very hour at which, half a century earlier, Bernadette saw

¹Canon Rousseil, "Les splendeurs de Lourdes."



*Holy Cross Infirmary where Sister Mary Bernard died.
The arm chair in which she breathed her last.
(Her bed is marked by a cross)*

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for the first time the Lady in white. This gigantic assembly, motionless and awestruck before the Grotto—which seems as though permeated with the Divine Presence—wore a solemn and mysterious aspect. Mgr. Schoepfer, having evoked the imperishable souvenir of February 11th, 1858, turned to practical considerations.

“Since the salvation of France is to be found at Lourdes,” said he, “what better resolution can we adopt than to love this centre of our national life as the Hebrews loved the Temple of Sion and the Ark of the Covenant.

“The mighty things wrought in this spot by the Mother of God in favour of the children of men, the homage offered in return by the children of men to the Mother of God, are sufficient pledges that in the years to come she will continue to abound in mercy to all her children and that they will never cease to drink at the source of her favours.”

Then, with a gesture akin to the sublime, he held up before the eyes of his electrified audience *Bernadette's rosary*, the identical rosary which she used in the presence of the heavenly Lady on the sacred occasions of the Apparitions.

The Angelus sounded from all the belfries of the domain of Mary. More than forty thousand Christians, united with the Princes of the Church, repeated on their knees the Angelic Salutation: “*Hail! Mary full of grace!*” and, in order that nothing should be wanting to this spectacle of faith and love, the venerable Cardinal Lécot, Archbishop of Bordeaux and Papal Legate, bestowed upon the prostrate multitudes the great absolution of Rome, the Plenary Indulgence of Mary's Jubilee.

Ritual, music, song, prayer and poetry combined to celebrate the glories of the Immaculate Virgin. Sacred eloquence offered its tribute through the lips of Mgr. Rumeau, Bishop of Angers, orator of the Golden

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Jubilee. "*Lourdes and France.*" "*Lourdes and the Church.*" "*Lourdes and the Pope.*" Such were the headings of the eloquent discourses which he delivered. To attempt an analysis of such masterpieces would only be to rob them of their charm. We must, however, draw special attention to the peroration of the first of the series, "a commentary upon the *Magnificat* which seems to breathe the very soul of our unhappy country, clinging to the feet of the Madonna and loth to die."

Upon the evening of the third day "Sion was forced to enlarge her tents," and it was beneath the glorious vault of heaven that the preacher addressed sixty thousands persons on the Esplanade. His subject—"Lourdes and the Vatican"—was of vital interest. Its development was an eloquent doctrinal tribute to the immemorial ties, which from the very dawn of Christianity have bound the Holy See to the Blessed Virgin. When, in the course of his argument drawn from the pages of history, the orator reached the days of the present glorious Pontiff, Pius X, so distinguished by his devotion to Mary, the enthusiasm of the audience was so great that it broke out into loud applause.

Then as a fitting climax to a memorable day came the "illuminations." Lourdes celebrated her joy and gratitude in *letters of fire*. The whole countryside was ablaze; churches, mountains and town alike. The Virgin of Lourdes appeared in the midst of an outburst of flame on the summit of the Espélugues, and, at her feet, a bouquet of lilies. The time-worn feudal chateau opposite seemed about to disappear in the general conflagration, as if desirous to render the homage of its long past of chivalry and faith to the Queen of the land, its august Sovereign.

It is impossible to give in our restricted space even a summary idea of the continuous tide of pilgrimages to the "land of miracles." From every country of the

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world they come, attracted as by a magnet. The Bishops are the first to give the example, and from America, Australia, New Zealand, New Caledonia, India, China, Armenia, Syria, Ceylon, Martinique, Zanzibar, etc., the faithful flock to the Madonna's feet, bringing the homage of their peoples and tribes, commending them to the heart of the Mother of Mercy, that she may bring them to the feet of Christ's missionaries, and so make them prisoners of her Son and of His Church.

Every nation has its special pilgrimage, as has also almost every diocese in the "Most Christian Kingdom." The national costumes and idioms of all mingle in their turn at Mary's feet. The pilgrims arrive in mighty throngs on the banks of the Gave. It soon becomes impossible to establish statistics of any value, and we can only repeat with admiration that to the Grotto of Massabielle has flocked "a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and tribes, and peoples, and tongues."¹

The national pilgrimage alone brings to Lourdes every year from fifty to sixty thousand of the faithful. All praise to this undaunted host of pacific crusaders, thronging unceasingly to the banner of Mary!

There are also the pilgrimages for men, veritable field-days for Our Lady's guard of honour! On certain occasions they have mustered more than sixty thousand strong around her Pyrénéan stronghold.

It is only meet that her leal Franks should mount guard perpetually about the throne of their Sovereign, for upon no other nation has she bestowed such prodigies of love throughout all the ages. Lourdes remains the eternal pledge of her predilection.

"Without wishing to represent our nation as better than it really is," writes Louis Veuillot, "how can we Catholics, whom oft-repeated interventions of the

¹Apocalypse, Ch. vii. v. 9.

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Blessed Virgin have saved from countless errors and perils, and who have seen ourselves in spite of frequent infidelities constantly reinstated by her maternal solicitude in the path of salvation, be other than proud of her preference?"

Remarking that during the course of the nineteenth century Mary has appeared on no less than twenty-one occasions to the people of her choice,¹ the eminent writer adds: "This century, which has succeeded that of the encyclopedists, may, in virtue of the admirable reaction of which we are the witnesses, be fitly christened the 'Century of Mary.'"

On all sides the ravages of materialism are evident, when suddenly a supernatural force, mightier to stir the world than the hosts of Alexander, Cæsar or Napoleon, enters the lists bearing the name and blazon of the Immaculate Conception. A miraculous spring bursts forth whose never-failing waters for half a century past flow for the healing of the nations.

Each year witnesses the arrival at Lourdes of the sacred cohort—"the maimed, the halt and the blind": many depart whole, and others full of hope and resignation.

On the occasion of the Silver, as of the Golden Jubilee, a multitude of those who had found new life in the miraculous spring summoned from the four quarters of the earth to this solemn thanksgiving, each bearing badge and banner, formed an unparalleled procession. Their grateful prayers drew down a flood of blessing on the heads of other sufferers.

Let us cite a few instances:²

On August 20th, 1878, James Combridge, a consumptive, arrived at Lourdes, lying at full length in

¹In 1830 the Blessed Virgin appeared to Sister Catherine Laboure, in 1846 to the children of La Salette and in 1870 to the children of Pontmain.

²We borrow these details in substance at least from the works of l'Abbé Bertrin and Doctor Boissarie.

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a railway carriage incapable of making the least movement : he was racked by an incessant cough, and his whole body was covered with sores. In this condition he was plunged into the piscina. He emerged a new man, dressed himself without assistance, walked with a firm step, and when the day of his departure arrived carried his own rug and portmanteau to the railway station. When his wife saw him she fainted from emotion. When he returned to Paris all those who had seen him at the point of death, unable to believe their eyes, followed him about to make sure that it was he. Two Protestant doctors who had attended him certified his recovery and offered him their congratulations. A third, on the contrary, appeared no less dissatisfied than astonished.

“What was done to cure you?” he inquired.

“Nothing, Doctor, the Blessed Virgin herself cured me.”

“Nonsense, the age of miracles is past; no one believes any longer in such stories. . . . You may as well tell me what they gave you.”

“Nothing, Doctor, you know as well as I that I had given up all remedies for some time previous. I can only repeat that I owe my recovery to the Blessed Virgin.”

“Get along with you, you and your Blessed Virgin; the thing is impossible: you are an impostor!”

Combridge left in tears, indignant at such a reception; but, after all, what harm could the doctor's prejudice do him? He was alive and well again. . . . What else mattered!

A young girl was attacked by “Pott's disease,” which deforms the spinal column, gives rise to purulent fistules, and extends its ravages to the lungs.

Delicate, tall and thin, she was a veritable child of Paris, sprouting, like a wild flower from a stony soil, half choked with thorns.

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She had been baptised at the age of eight, and was seventeen when she made her First Communion; several of her brothers had died without receiving Holy Baptism.

When she fell ill she consulted Doctor Ferrand at the Hotel-Dieu Hospital, and subsequently the surgeon Necker, but their treatment was ineffective.

Finally she heard of Lourdes, and for a whole year she went without her tea, amassing thereby the sum of forty-five francs, enough to carry her thither. When the moment came her parents had not the wherewithal to pay their rent and the poor child surrendered to them her little savings representing her entire fortune!

Farewell, pilgrimage! Farewell, hope! Nevertheless, the year following, in 1895, her self-sacrifice was rewarded: she was amongst the number of the sick admitted to take part in the national pilgrimage.

She arrived bearing a certificate from Doctor Chérié. Her spinal column was twisted in the form of the letter S, so as to form a double protuberance in front and behind.

On August 21st she entered the piscina, the affliction vanished in a few seconds: the spinal column which had been deformed was suddenly straightened.

Another extraordinary case is that of Mademoiselle Constance Piquet, of Soulaire, in the Department Eure and Loire, who visited the miraculous spring on August 24th, 1894, suffering from a malignant tumour in the breast already in the third year of its growth.

Doctor Martin, of Lèves, had refused to operate, judging the case incurable, as he stated clearly in the medical certificate he delivered.

One of her friends, Mademoiselle Masson, had examined the tumour at the moment of her departure. The lady volunteer who assisted the patient into the water saw it with her own eyes and even touched it.

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Two minutes later when Mademoiselle Piquet emerged from the piscina no trace of it existed.

Materialism, bewildered and discouraged, was forced to admit, in the words of Doctor Charcot himself, who had set up against the phenomena of Lourdes the results obtained at the Salpêtrière Hospital at Paris: "Yes, it is an indubitable fact that the water of the Grotto, the Sanctuary of Massabielle, and the faith of which they are the manifestation, work veritable miracles."

But the Immaculate Virgin, when she expressed a desire to see a chapel raised on the heights of Massabielle, made it sufficiently apparent that, although she came with her hands full of miraculous favours, and caused a spring to burst forth within the Grotto for the healing of the body, her principal aim was to save souls, to spread the Kingdom of her Divine Son. Her undisputed prerogative is to show the Child Jesus to succeeding generations, and in union with Him to respond to the adoration of mankind by showering upon them the blessings of God.¹

With the inauguration of the Crypt of the new church, altar and confessional were brought, as it were, to the Grotto's door. The Holy Victim was daily offered up almost within its precincts, and thus dawned the glorious era of Eucharistic sacrifice, forgiveness, and spiritual resurrection. Immense throngs besieged the altar rails, and innumerable communions gladdened heaven itself.

How many souls would have remained strangers to Jesus in the Sacrament of His Love had not Mary drawn them to Lourdes, there to throw aside human respect and lay the foundations of their spiritual life!

Hearts encouraged, hopes renewed, moral sufferings healed, tears wiped away, sacrifices accepted—who shall tell their toll! And what shall we say of

¹Mgr. Izart—Sermon delivered at Lourdes on July 16th 1908.

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those mysterious instances of self-sacrifice, more common than one would suppose, where Heaven, sanctioning an impulse of heroic charity, permits the substitution of one victim for another. Such was the case with Madame Catay who, had been enabled to make the pilgrimage, through the generosity of Made-moiselle Jeanne Tulasne, and who, seeing that her young benefactress had not been cured, pleaded magnanimously:

“Oh! my God, if one of us two is to be healed, let it be Jeanne!”

She had scarcely spoken when a cry was heard from the crowd: Jeanne had just sprung from her stretcher radiant with joy, completely cured!

Who has not heard of the young consumptives of Villepinte!

This little community was accustomed to receive an abundant share of the Divine Mother's favours. Year by year some of these young lives, apparently destined to be cut down in their flower, were restored to life and vigour at the annual pilgrimage.

In 1903 not a single cure took place, but, in spite of this, the poor girls were no less joyful than usual when the time came to return to their beds of suffering. The reason soon leaked out: during this year of religious ruin many hospitals had been laicised, a large number of schools closed, and religious orders despoiled and banished. The dear girls of Villepinte, fearing a similar fate might overtake their Retreat, had joined unanimously in the following prayer:

“O God, let none of us be cured this year, but grant that our dear Mistresses may be spared to us.”

Their Mistresses were left unmolested, but, as we have seen, not a single one of their own number was cured at Lourdes.

If it were possible to record all the instances of heroic devotion sprung from the soil of Lourdes, the home of miracles, what hidden riches of self-

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sacrifice would be brought to light! They are forever buried in the secret of pious hearts: Mary has kept count of them all.

Active service finds abundant scope at Lourdes; in this respect it is "the greatest school of practical charity which has ever existed in any country." The *Brancardiers* or Litter-bearers are accustomed to support without a murmur, heat and cold, sun and rain, hunger and thirst, as well as the interminable delays consequent upon their duties.¹ Their care and infinite tenderness are almost maternal.

Women of rank and young ladies, often of the highest society, covet the privilege of acting as volunteer nurses and attendants upon the poor, lowering with their own hands into the miraculous waters, as gently as possible, the bodies of unfortunate sufferers, only too often loathsome to behold.

Sisters of Charity, whatever be their station, their whole life is a consecration to the alleviation of suffering. What a spectacle in this age of materialism!

It is the triumph of Our Lady, a triumph which she has prepared for her Son. We might easily fancy ourselves in the Holy Land witnessing a renewal of the episodes of the Gospel in Judea. Jesus is present in the Sacred Host, the priest bears Him through the crowds in a resplendent monstrance, and, as upon the day when He made His entry into Jerusalem, thousands of voices shout: "*Hosannah to the Son of David! Blessed is He who cometh in the name of the Lord!*"²

As of old, we hear cries of anguish, suffering and faith as He passes by: "*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy upon me! Lord, that I may see! Lord, give me to walk! Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make*

¹Abbé Bertrin—"Histoire critique de Lourdes."

²It was a priest of the diocese of Montauban who initiated the practice of acclaiming Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament as He passed.

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me whole!" And suddenly we see the sick arise, the lame walk, the blind open their eyes to the light of day.

One of the most striking cures on record is that of Gabriel Gargam, a letter-sorter. On December 17th, 1899, he was on duty on the Paris "La Rapide," which leaves Bordeaux at 10.30 p. m. The postal car in which he worked was the last but one on the train. Owing to the locomotive being out of order, the train came to a dead stop a mile or two from Angoulême. Not many minutes after the breakdown had occurred, an appalling roar was heard in the distance and an express, travelling at 40 miles an hour, dashed into the rear of "La Rapide."

"In a second," relates Gargam, "our coach was reduced to splinters. I was thrown thirty feet away at the foot of an embankment, where, buried in the snow, I remained undiscovered till seven o'clock the next morning. I was, to all appearances, dead. About ten I was transported with the rest of the injured to Angoulême, where I was taken to the Hospital. I was covered with bruises and sores and incapable of making the least movement."

The horrible shock, which might easily have been immediately fatal, so profoundly shattered his whole organism that every natural function seemed suspended, and his extremities became gradually lifeless. Nevertheless, he dragged on for eighteen or twenty months, but without any signs of amelioration. Both his feet were devoured by sores: a sort of gangrene declared itself; he was already doomed and dying by inches.

He greatly longed, knowing that his case was hopeless, to see his family once again, to leave the bed and the ward where he had suffered so much. He heard the pilgrimage to Lourdes mentioned and had his name inscribed on the list, not impelled by any consideration of faith, but by the sole desire to escape

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from the hospital. He was powerless even to raise his head or make the slightest movement. A stretcher was prepared, of the exact width of the railway carriage door, to admit of his being lifted in and out of the train. His male attendant, his mother and two other persons accompanied him.

When he left he was wasted to a shadow, and resembled a corpse still betraying some faint remains of life. Worse than all, his heart seemed hardened against grace.

Finally he arrived at the Grotto. Immediately his whole being was transformed; the finger of God had touched him. Faith had conquered, and his soul was filled with divine rejoicing. His eyes filled with loving tears as he raised them towards the Blessed Virgin who had healed his soul.

He was present at the procession of the Blessed Sacrament, a human wreck, lying helpless by the wayside where Our Saviour was to pass. Whilst waiting, he lost consciousness, his face became of a deathly pallor, his limbs cold and lifeless. "He is dying," cried the bystanders. At that moment, to quote the words of the correspondent of the London "Daily Mail" (a Jew by birth): "As the golden monstrance, resplendent in the rays of the setting sun, approached, an inarticulate cry burst from the lips of a human form lying prostrate at my feet. A woman bending over the stretcher exclaimed in a voice stifled by emotion, 'Holy Mother of God, I thank thee!'

"Scarcely had she spoken when, like one called from the dead, a man rose to his feet and tottered a few steps in the wake of the Blessed Sacrament. He was unclothed and unshod; pious hands detained him and forced him back upon his stretcher. 'A cure! A cure!' was the cry. By sheer force he was rescued from the enthusiastic demonstrations of the multitude."

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It would be easy to prolong indefinitely the list of cures.

“Jesus Christ in His royal progress scatters a largesse of miracles at every step: Divine Omnipotence crowns with a visible and tangible diadem the mystery of the Holy Eucharist. How many before leaving Lourdes bend the knee and cry: “Verily mine eyes have beheld God under the sacramental veil.”¹

The devotion to Our Lady of Lourdes has spread far beyond the boundaries of France and even of Europe. In savage lands, wherever missionaries have penetrated, grottoes are to be found—ofttimes of the humblest workmanship—but sufficing to recall to mind the one wherein the Immaculate Virgin deigned to appear. She vouchsafes to extend her favours to these haunts of prayer, replicas of the sacred rock of Massabielle.

In this connection, let us cite the well-known case of Pierre de Rudder, a farmhand of Jabbeke in Belgium. Both the bones of one leg had been broken at the same point by the fall of a tree; attempts had been made to unite the bones, but when the plaster-of-Paris was removed it was found that the extremities were stripped of their periosteum and the wound was full of pus. A splinter of bone detached at the point of fracture had buried itself in the tissues, and the two bones were exposed to view. The doctors insisted on immediate amputation, but their patient refused his consent. The Belgians had established at Oostacker, near Ghent, a grotto modelled upon that of Lourdes. Pierre de Rudder had himself transported thither to implore the Madonna's assistance. The lower part of his leg was hanging helpless. To those who, on seeing his hopeless plight, asked him what good he expected to get from visiting

¹Mgr. Izart.

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Oostacker with a leg in such a condition, he replied: "Others have been cured there, why should not I?" His faith was rewarded. Seated before the statue of the Blessed Virgin, "he began by asking the forgiveness of his sins, then he implored Our Lady of Lourdes to grant him the grace to be able to work to earn the daily bread of his wife and children, so that they might no longer be dependent upon charity." Suddenly an indescribable sensation ran through his entire system. He felt himself profoundly stirred and agitated as if beside himself; he rose and fell on his knees: he was cured!

Such are the prodigies of love in which Our Lady delights. Even in the heart of Rome we find Lourdes installed. Pius IX was still living when a miniature grotto, recalling to mind the great original, was built in the gardens of the Vatican. The miraculous water, with which the Holy Father was kept abundantly supplied by filial solicitude, flowed from it, as at Lourdes. In his daily walk the Holy Father never failed to visit his beloved grotto. "*No wonder I love it; it is my own little corner of France,*" he would sometimes say.

Leo XIII was no less ardent in his affection for the City of Mary.

"*Have you ever been to Lourdes?*" he enquired one day of an Italian Cardinal.

"Only in spirit, Holy Father," was the reply.

"*Oh! in spirit,*" rejoined the Pope, "*we have all been there often in spirit and are constantly returning.*"¹

Pius X has seen the "*little corner of France*" enlarged. He has before his eyes a complete reproduction of the holy places at Lourdes, so that in the very midst of the Vatican gardens one might suppose one's self on the banks of the Gave. The revered Pontiff,

¹Abbé Bertrin—"Histoire critique de Lourdes."

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desiring to inspire our souls with confidence, says in the noble encyclical full of doctrine and piety wherein he celebrated the Golden Jubilee of the Immaculate Conception: "Let the storm arise, none of us needs tremble; the sight of Mary will appease the divine wrath. We have but to place our hope in her; on our behalf she will show herself the mighty Queen who crushed the serpent's head under her virginal heel."

Again—in a letter addressed to the Bishop of Tarbes, Guardian of the Sanctuary of Lourdes, the Pontiff says:

"We confide ourselves to her maternal protection. We have every confidence that by her supernatural aid your country will emerge victorious over all the evils that assail her."

Once more—in his Encyclical, "*Pascendi dominici gregis*," condemning the errors of Modernism, Pius X exclaims: "May the Immaculate Virgin, destroyer of all heresies, aid you by her prayers!"

Finally, not long since, Pius X remarked to a French Prelate who was visiting Rome:¹

"The existence of France forms part of God's designs; no other nation can take her place. God and the Virgin Mary have overwhelmed her with the most signal favours. There is but one Paray-le-Monial, but one Lourdes, and both are in France."

And who was the *Apostle* chosen to prepare the wonderful movement which we have all too briefly outlined? We have done our best to set her before our readers, but let us add the testimony of Father Marie-Antoine:²

"Between the two fortresses which defend the Church, the Immaculate Virgin and the Papacy, behold a humble grain of sand. Upon this grain of

¹Mgr. Chatelus, Bishop of Nevers.

²A Capuchin friar surnamed the "Saint of Toulouse."

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sand, the fury of the ocean shall spend itself in vain. Against this grain of sand its foaming billows shall be shattered. By it the ocean shall be conquered. The grain of sand is the Apostle of the Immaculate Virgin, the Apostle of Our Lady of Lourdes—*Bernadette*."

There were other spheres—humbler, but no less fruitful—in which the child exercised her apostleship, and in all she offered a shining example. Since the day when she had been admitted to intimate communion with the Immaculate Virgin, her soul seemed capable of responding to every touch. Marvellous, indeed, it is to be in unison with God and His Blessed Mother!

Bernadette, transformed into Sister Marie-Bernard, became nothing less than an *apostle* in the midst of her family in religion, not by the spoken word—we know in what high esteem she held her vow of silence—but rather by the perfume of her Virtues, which captivated souls and brought them nearer to God. We have already seen how, true religious that she was, she fulfilled this mission.

There exists another field for apostleship of which perhaps too little account is made. It is, nevertheless, open to every one of us and is not wanting in attractions. Its centre of activity is in the family circle. So long as she remained at home, Bernadette was the guardian angel of her own. Her sister Mary describes how she watched over her brothers and sisters, insisting upon a respectful attitude at prayers. One day, when her sister had got into bed too soon, intending to say her prayers under the clothes, she obliged her to get up again and say them properly.

After having entered the convent, she never ceased her affectionate guidance. Her correspondence with her brothers and sisters, touching in its simplicity, shows a continual solicitude for their welfare, especially after the death of their parents. Unhappily,

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very few of her letters have survived the family dispersal—most have been destroyed—for she always desired that they should be burnt as soon as they had been read. Moreover, at a certain period they were few and far between. She herself gives the reason for this. Writing to her brother Jean-Marie on October 7th, 1878, she says: “I have been told that my letters pass from hand to hand; this is a source of real trouble to me, and if it continues I shall be obliged to stop writing altogether.”

When affliction overtook them she was ever ready with words of affection and consolation, which her lively faith inspired. She writes to her sister:

“Our Lord has been pleased to take from us what was dearest to us here below, our much-loved father. My tears mingle with your own in our deep affliction. Let us, nevertheless, remain submissive and resigned beneath the hand of Divine Providence which has latterly dealt us such heavy blows. Let us bear without a murmur and kiss the cross which Jesus has laid upon us. Let us beseech Him and the Blessed Virgin to grant us strength and courage to bear it after their holy example and without giving way to discouragement.

“The loss of our beloved father wrings our hearts, but we have the immense consolation of knowing that he was privileged to receive the Last Sacraments. Thanks be to Our Lord for this great grace.

“Let us pray continually for the repose of his soul and that of our dear mother. I implore you to have Masses said for them as often as you are able.

“I share fully, dear sister, in the grief that your maternal heart has felt for the loss of your dear little Bernadette. Comfort yourself, she is now a little angel praying in heaven for us who have so much need of prayers.

“I hear that Aunt Lucile is very ill and I fear the worst. Write me, please, and tell me the whole



Bernadette in death

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truth. If she is still alive when this reaches you, tell her that I am praying for her, and so are all our Sisters. I implore God and the Our Lady to spare her for her children's sake. I would willingly make the sacrifice of my own life to Our Lord in exchange if it were His Holy Will.

"The Sacraments have never killed anyone; I hear that she has made her confession and am glad to know it. I hope by this time she will have had the happiness of receiving Our Lord. He alone can heal both soul and body. Tell her that I am continually present with her in spirit. I beg my little niece to kiss her mother for me."

Shortly after she writes again to her brother Jean-Marie:

"I can only kiss the crosses which the Divine Master has seen fit to lay upon us. Let us pray Him to grant that we may bear them with submission and generosity.

"Our trials have been great this year, dear brother! God has His own designs, it is true, but the blows are heavy. Our poor father was taken from us suddenly, but we have the consolation of knowing that he received the Last Sacraments. It is a great grace for which we should be very thankful.

"Let us, nevertheless, pray continually for the repose of his soul and also for our poor Aunt Lucile, whose children are greatly to be pitied. Do not forget, also, to pray the Blessed Virgin for our sister Marie: she is much in need of consolation. You know how she has suffered by the loss of her little Bernadette, whom she loved so much. What a trial for a mother!

"Good-bye, dear brother; let us pray Our Lord one for the other to grant us the graces necessary to become saints. Let us strive to accept generously the sacrifices that the Master sends us and offer them for the repose of the souls of those we have lost."

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Again—to her sister at a moment of trial:

“I had just written to you when your letter reached me. Don’t be worried or cast down. Rather, have confidence, for it is the best medicine for the soul. How much you need to hear a word of consolation from time to time to give you new strength and courage.

“The more we have suffered in this life, the greater will be our consolation at the hour of death, provided that we have suffered in union with Jesus, for the love of Jesus, and for the expiation of our sins.”

The future career of her brothers preoccupied her much. On July 1st, 1876, she writes to her brother Jean-Marie, who was undergoing his military service:

“Cousin Nicolau tells me in her last letter that you expect to receive your discharge this year. Give me an idea of what you intend doing. You know that although far away my interest in you is the same as if I were near. I do not ask you this question from curiosity, dear brother. Now that our beloved parents are dead, it seems to be my duty as the eldest of the family to watch over you all. I need hardly say what lively interest I take in all that concerns the three of you.

“I own that just at present I am greatly preoccupied as to your future and Pierre’s, too. Every day I pray Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin to guide you aright. Before all things I conjure you to be faithful to your duties as a Christian. Thus alone will you be sure of finding light and strength in all the troubles and difficulties of life. I know that soldiers have much to put up with and that they have to suffer in silence. If only they were careful to repeat every morning when they rise the following short prayer to Our Lord: ‘O my God, to-day I desire to do everything and suffer everything for Thy sake and for love of Thee.’ A soldier who did this regularly, and accom-

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plished his duties as a Christian as far as he was able, would have as much merit as a religious."

She followed with special interest the career of her youngest brother, "her little Pierre," as she was accustomed to call him.

On the occasion of his First Communion she wrote to him expressing her joy at his reception of this great grace.

"It is with the greatest satisfaction that I learn that you are to have the happiness of making your First Communion on June 9th. Needless to say, that from now till the great day your heart, spirit and soul, my dear little brother, should be filled with one single desire: to make of your heart a worthy habitation for God. Let Our Saviour be continually present in your thoughts. Pray Him to make ready His own dwelling place, so that nothing may be wanting when He arrives.

"What goodness on His part to condescend to give Himself to us and make our poor heart His home!

"Never cease to pray the Most Holy Virgin, my dear little brother, to grant you all the graces necessary for the worthy fulfilment of this great act."

At a certain moment a misunderstanding arose between the Fathers of Garaison (under whose care her youngest brother was being educated) and her sister Marie, who was naturally interested in him. Bernadette writes to the latter:

"I am greatly surprised at what you tell me. Go and see the Curé, explain your trouble to him, and then do as he tells you. This is the only advice I can give you on the subject, and you will do well to take.

"I hear that Joseph¹ has some idea of setting my little Pierre to keep a sort of shop if he removes him from Garaison. Tell him from me that I formally

¹Sister Marie-Bernard's brother-in-law.

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forbid this; it would be an improper proceeding and would not have God's approval.

"I desire that Pierre should remain where His Lordship the Bishop of Tarbes wishes him to be left, to complete his education. I do not consent to your removing him from Garaison except under Monseigneur's orders. You should not interfere with the dear child's studies. I know that he is giving great satisfaction. Do not let yourself be influenced by bad advice; don't get excited. You are at liberty to ask the good Fathers for an explanation. I do not wish you to hurt anybody's feelings. I am your elder sister; I have the right to watch over my little brother's career."

At the same time she wrote explaining the difficulty to the worthy Curé Peyramale, who she was well aware would take a father's interest in its solution. She begged him to arrange matters so as to calm her sister's apprehensions.

"I understand," she writes, "that Pierre is on the point of making his First Communion. When he has learnt as much as is necessary for his condition in life, I should like to see him apprenticed to a trade, so as to have the means of gaining an honest livelihood, provided, always, he shows no signs of vocation for the priesthood."

What a dream of bliss for a soul such as Sister Marie-Bernard's, the happiness of seeing her little Pierre a priest! What more could she desire?

But she knew how great is the grace of the priestly vocation, carrying with it—as it does—such formidable responsibilities that the very angels themselves would shrink from assuming them. Remark with what an instinct of holy things she writes him on November 3rd, 1876:

"I have been informed that it is possible that you will not be returning to Garaison this coming year. If you are really convinced that God has given you

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no vocation for the religious life, I strongly advise you to make up your mind to learn a trade. If you are not afraid of work you will always be able to make a living and provide for yourself. I beg you, dear brother, to reflect seriously upon the matter in the sight of God. I would not for the whole world that you should become a priest in order to make a position for yourself. Better far become a rag-picker.

"I hope you will recognise that it is my keen anxiety for your soul's welfare which makes me write thus. Again I beseech you to give the matter most serious consideration, and, above all, to pray Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin to make known their holy will to you."

On the same date she writes to her sister :

"Please let me know whether Pierre intends to return to Garaison. We must know for certain what his intentions are, for he has reached an age when he should be learning a trade, if he really has no religious vocation."

Again on December 27th, 1876, she writes:

"I am really very anxious about Pierre, who has not written to me for a long time past. I assure you I am greatly troubled about him. I often wonder whether he is at home or not. What is he working at? Please let me know whether he is behaving well and what his occupation is.

"I beg you, dear sister, to let me have a word from you as soon as possible. Try to accept generously the sacrifices God has asked of you in taking to Himself your dear children. Let us always submit ourselves to the adorable and holy will of God."

It is a common idea that the religious who has been heroic enough to make the sacrifice of her family, thereafter forgets it, and takes no further interest in its joys or sorrows. This is a great mistake. The religious life in no wise abolishes our natural affections; it raises and ennobles them, and in so

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doing renders them stronger and more unselfish. How the soul of St. Teresa was wrapt in God and yet what a loving heart is revealed in her life and letters! All the Saints have a family likeness, and, setting aside the individual traits which distinguish soul from soul, we may say that all give out the same note, for all are tuned alike to the love of God.

Sister Marie-Bernard writes to her sister giving her good advice as to the bringing-up of her children:

"I learnt with pleasure that you and your little girl were well. I pray Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin to spare us the dear child whom I love tenderly. I would sooner, however, a thousand times hear of her death than live to see her grow up other than a good Christian.

"What care you should take to bring her up well.

"As soon as she can understand, teach her to know and love God and the Blessed Virgin and to respect her mother. Give her a great horror of evil. By so doing you and her father will be fulfilling your duty as parents. Never forget that the day will come when Our Lord will call you to account for this soul committed to you.

"All sorts of affectionate messages to god-mother and all her family. I pray Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin every day to make them good and fill them with the love of God. Love God all your lives, children; it is the greatest happiness you can have on earth and the only one which carries with it the promise of eternal happiness in heaven hereafter.

"Many thanks to Joseph for what he sent me. I was delighted to hear that he is faithful to his duties as a Christian. Nothing you could possibly tell me could give me more pleasure than this."

From another letter to her sister dated June 25th, 1876:

"I am sending you some medals which have been blessed by the Holy Father and have touched the bowl

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supposed to have been used by the Infant Jesus and preserved in the Holy House at Loretto. One of them is for you, the other for my little niece, the St. Joseph is intended for my brother-in-law. I want him to keep it in his pocket and every day to repeat the following little prayer: 'St. Joseph, pray for me and my family; grant us thy protection.' I hope he will not refuse me this little favour.

"One of our dear Sisters has given me a coloured egg;¹ thinking my little niece would be pleased with it, I am sending it along. Good-bye."

She writes to the same on July 4th:

"I am very worried about you. I hear that the Gave has overflowed its banks. I am anxious to know whether the flood did much damage to the Grotto or to the mill, on the river side. I take it that the town was in no danger?

"It appears that a lot of damage was done at Tarbes and that there were even lives lost. I am rather afraid for our relations at Monieres. Try and give me news of them.

"I have had a letter from cousin Jeanne. She asks to be remembered to you and my brothers. I am rather anxious about her; she is near Toulouse¹ where the floods have caused fearful devastation. She says that many persons perished in the floods, such a thing has never been known to happen before."

Having thus given vent to a cry of sympathy, she continues:

"God chastens us, but always as a Father! We have seen the streets of Paris running red with blood. Even that did not suffice to touch hearts hardened in sin. Now the cities of the South in their turn are paying their toll of lives.

¹One of the eggs Sister Marie-Bernard was in the habit of decorating.

¹Jeanne Videre, religious in the Trappist convent at Blagnac, near Toulouse.

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“My God! I repeat, forgive us and grant us mercy!”

How many persons, outside her own family circle, would have loved to receive a few lines from Bernadette's pen! The letters addressed to her asking for her prayers were never given her; the Superior sent suitable replies and recommended the intentions of the senders to the prayers of Sister Marie-Bernard and of the Community at one and the same time: a course dictated by prudence.

The young religious never corresponded regularly with her former friends at Lourdes; when she did on rare occasions write to them, it is easy to see from the tone of her letters that she only sought their spiritual consolation and encouragement.

Let our readers judge from the following extract:

“My very dear Rachel, I was far from expecting that I should owe the occasion for a few words with you to such a sad event. I need hardly assure you how truly I sympathise with you in your very natural and legitimate sorrow. God chastens those whom He loves, so you are entitled to occupy a very special place in His Heart; there alone, dear friend, you will find true and lasting consolation; it is Himself who invites us in those touching words of His: Come to me all you who labour and are burdened and I will refresh you.’

“Seek this Divine Comforter as often as you can. He alone can fully understand your desolation of soul. Rest assured that you will never be forgotten in my prayers, however unworthy they may be. Neither shall I forget to pray continually Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin for the repose of the soul of your dear husband; I have already received Holy Communion for this intention. In the depth of your affliction you have always the greatest of consolations. Your beloved husband was pious, he passed away in the peace and love of Our Lord; you weep

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then for one who is not dead, but asleep: one day, I trust, you will both meet again in heaven, where there is no more parting.

"I can assure you that I was deeply touched and consoled in reading the extract from one of his letters, wherein his lively faith finds such perfect expression. I am not surprised at the calm and resignation, nay more, at the holy indifference to life or death which he displayed in his last moments. The grace of God alone is capable of working such miracles.

"We may have a firm hope, dear friend, that he whom you mourn rejoices, or soon will rejoice in the vision of God—that God, who was the strength and food of his soul upon earth.

"How much Our Lord must love you when He sends you such a trial! I pray you, dear friend, not to allow sorrow to be your master. Try to remain always submissive and resigned to the will of God; it is always sweet even in the moment of sacrifice, for Jesus takes such sole possession of our hearts that it is He alone who lives and acts within us. He will doubtless whisper in the depths of your heart these words of healing:

" 'Take courage, I sever the dearest ties which bind you to earth, but it is only to unite them again forever in heaven.'

"How grateful I shall be if, when you go to the Grotto, you will say a prayer for me to the Most Holy Virgin, our Blessed Mother: I will try to repay you."

Such was Sister Marie-Bernard: ever an apostle, one of those devoted, generous and faithful hearts who scatter on every side, knowingly and unknowingly, the good seed of the Divine Husbandman.

V

THE FAITHFUL CHILD OF MARY

PIETY of soul attracts the Most High, humility delights Him, charity prompts Him to work wonders within us. Mary's predilections are the same: the pure heart attracts her favours as the mountain peaks are the first to catch the rays of the rising sun. Therein we may suppose lies one of the reasons for her choosing to reveal herself to the innocent peasant girl, Bernadette.

All her life she was the Blessed Virgin's favourite treasure, the pure lily of innocence with virginal delicacy, and God Himself enveloped her with the thorns of suffering, so that on the day of her funeral Mgr. Lelong could truthfully exclaim :

"The work of the Divine Master in Sister Marie-Bernard was evident in the purity which reigned supreme in her limpid and ingenuous gaze; it was in itself a sufficient testimony to her worthiness to be the daughter of the Virgin who had spoken with her face to face. The charm of purity shone within her like a flawless diamond. Doubtless it was this purity which caused her to be chosen recipient of the favours of Mary, just as it had merited for Mary herself the condescension of the Most High : "*Virginitate placuit.*"

Who can fathom the tenderness and indulgence of Mary for her child? Not only did she constitute her, her apostle and her evangelist, but by revealing herself to Bernadette alone in the Apparitions she enveloped herself with her favourite in an impenetrable mystery.

For Bernadette's ear alone were the confidences which intimacy invites, her eyes alone witnessed the

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tears which intimacy allows; for her heart alone were the joys which intimacy loves to share, upon her alone were bestowed those smiles which intimacy holds sacred. To none but tried and faithful friends do we entrust the secrets which are the highest proof of our confidence.

Bernadette, on her side, thought of nothing but the marvellous Lady. She waited for her, gazed at her, prayed to her, listened to her, replied to her, reflecting her every expression, yielding herself up to her with her whole soul and body rapt in ecstasy, keeping deeply buried in her heart the secrets of the Queen of Heaven, never letting fall a word which might betray their purport. There existed, as it were, a sacred compact between the Mother and her child. What a mother! and let us add: What a child! for in all things there is reciprocity, and if it may be said of God, that "love creates resemblance," we may suppose that Mary, before unfolding her heart to Bernadette, drew her closer to herself by an outpouring of light and love.

In early days, when tending her flock on the hills around Bartrès, the "Ave Maria" had formed a sacred link between the heart of the Most Holy Virgin and the heart of Bernadette. At Lourdes we have seen her reciting this prayer—or rather singing it in her soul—at the foot of the sacred Rock.

The religious at the Hospital continually discovered her telling her beads in the silence of the chapel, whilst at Nevers the Sisters esteemed it a grace to kneel with Sister Marie-Bernard at the feet of the Blessed Virgin and to repeat with her the Angelic Salutation!

How many victories have this same rosary and sign of the cross won for the Blessed Virgin!

A religious relates how in 1865, when she herself was ten years old, Bernadette, shortly before her departure for Nevers, came on day to visit the

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St Angela's Convent at Oloron, where our informant was being educated. All the pupils were gathered in the large hall and Bernadette entered, in her Pyrenean costume. Seated in the Mistress's chair, she began by making the sign of the cross, saying: "Always make it in this way, for it was thus the Blessed Virgin made it on the occasion of her first apparition."

After having spoken to them of their Mother in heaven, she took her rosary and recited it aloud with a fervour which deeply impressed them all. "My devotion to the Blessed Virgin and fidelity to the practice of the three 'Ave Marias' date from her visit," says the religious in question.

Requests were constantly addressed to the Mother-House, as we have already seen, for novenas to be made by Bernadette. A religious writes: "During Bernadette's novitiate the Novice-Mistress was always careful to assign her a companion in the accomplishment of these works of charity. I can still hear her maternal voice saying: 'Go both of you together at such and such an hour every day, for nine days, and say a prayer to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart.' One day, when I had been chosen to accompany her, as we were leaving the tribune Bernadette said to me: 'Why do you always keep your eyes on the statue of Our Lady whilst you are praying?' 'In order to have fewer distractions.' 'Oh! well, in my case it would have the contrary effect!' 'I can quite understand that if I, like yourself, had seen the real Blessed Virgin I should not trouble to look at her statue.' Sister Marie-Bernard lowered her eyes and made no reply." With the eyes of her soul she had doubtless been gazing again on the glorious vision of Massabielle.

Was she similarly absorbed on the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin as she listened to

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the hymn¹ in which Mary is depicted as rising from the desert full of majesty? When they came to the words "*'Tis my Mother. . . . I behold her!*" several of the Sisters noticed² Sister Marie-Bernard tremble with emotion. Her face alight with heavenly radiance, she made a movement as if to struggle to her feet, then falling on her knees again buried her face in her hands to conceal her emotion.

It is customary in the Novitiate to begin the recreation with the singing of a hymn. "You should sing sometimes: '*One day I shall see her—this dearest of Mothers*,'" said Sister Marie-Bernard to one of her companions— at the same time her eyes seemed to fill with sadness and longing and a tear trickled down each cheek.

Everything which recalled her beloved Lourdes struck a responsive chord in her heart. At the time of which we write there existed within the convent grounds a little meadow bordered by poplars—subsequent changes have entailed its disappearance. "*Oh! those poplars!*" she would often exclaim, "*how they remind me of the Gave and the Grotto!*" Then, having expressed her regrets, she would relapse into silence. She admitted, however, that "*every day she revisited in spirit her beloved rock to make a little pilgrimage.*"

Mgr. de Ladoue, before leaving for Lourdes to assist at the coronation of the statue of Our Lady, asked Bernadette whether she did not desire to accompany him. She replied:

"*Monseigneur, I should be delighted to witness the triumph of the Blessed Virgin, but on condition that I was placed so as to be able to see without being seen, high up in the air like a little bird. Besides, it is not God's will that I should ever return to Lourdes.*

¹By Rossich.

²This occurred on at least two occasions.

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Before leaving for Nevers I bade farewell to the Grotto for good."

The second Chaplain of the community had the privilege of being present at the solemnity and witnessing the triumph for Our Lady. Sister Marie-Bernard entrusted him with a word of remembrance for her family and prayed him to be the bearer of her heart's loving tribute to the Grotto. In his émotion, at kissing the sacred rock for the first time, his eyes filled with tears and he repeated: "Most Holy Virgin, remember that I come in Bernadette's name."

Upon his return he desired to render an account of his mission to Sister Marie-Bernard. But let us allow him to speak for himself.

"When I got back to Nevers, the Réverend Mother General permitted me to give Bernadette an account of my impressions as a pilgrim and to describe fully to her the solemnities at Lourdes.

"I narrated all to her in detail and answered all the questions she had to ask about her family, about the alterations and embellishments at the Grotto and the ceremony of the coronation of the Most Holy Virgin.

"Our beloved Sister Marie-Bernard was enraptured as she followed the great events I retraced for her. Her face lit up with joy as I spoke to her of the mighty demonstrations of faith, of the concourse of the pilgrims from France and the whole world to Lourdes. She saw therein the realisation of the Blessed Virgin's wish when she said: 'Go and tell the priests that I desire that the people should come in procession to this spot.' Her heart was filled with joy.

"When I had finished relating my pilgrimage and all the details that could be of interest to her, she gazed at me with an expression of angelic candour and simplicity, and said: '*What would have become of me in the midst of such crowds? I did well to*

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remain in my infirmity.' Admirable words revealing, as with a flashlight, Sister Marie-Bernard's humility of soul. So long as the Most Holy Virgin were known and glorified upon earth what mattered it to her poor little religious that she was to remain unknown, forgotten, and despised. Such was the sole aspiration of her heart."

At the foot of the grounds of the Mother-House there exists in a sort of rustic grotto overgrown with ivy a statue of the Blessed Virgin, the only one that Sister Marie-Bernard pronounced to be not "too unlike." She loved to contemplate it and, as often as she was able, would go and visit this humble shrine. The statue itself is not without a history. The community and Novitiate were transferred in 1856 to St. Gildard and installed in new buildings raised on the side of the ruins of the ancient Priory of the same name. At that time the convent enjoyed the charm of almost complete solitude¹ and there was general satisfaction at the choice which had been made: when suddenly it was discovered that the water supply was defective. Prayers were offered to the Blessed Virgin and a vow was made to place her statue above the spring which she might cause to be discovered. Every confidence was felt that she would not abandon her children in their need. Their trust was not misplaced: the spring was found² and soon after the statue of the Blessed Virgin was placed over it as a pledge of gratitude: It was christened "*Our Lady of the Waters.*"

A spring which owed its discovery to prayer; a Virgin watching over it, possessing a certain resemblance to her whom she had seen: what more was needed to constitute a little corner of Lourdes for

¹Since this date many buildings have sprung up around the convent, owing to the laying out of a new boulevard.

²Due in reality to a water-bearing stratum extending beneath the grounds, but fed from an exterior source.

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Bernadette? All the statues she had seen were so far removed from her ideal from that vision of celestial beauty her eyes had gazed upon! She was never tired of multiplying her apologies to Our Blessed Lady.

"Mother mine, how they disfigure thee!"

"What a surprise it will be for these artists when they see thee!"

One day, calling a companion, she exclaimed:

"Look at that goitre with which they have deformed the Blessed Virgin! I never said that she raised her head; I said she raised her eyes. I cannot understand why they make such caricatures of her."

When she was asked: "Was she then so very beautiful?" she replied: *"So beautiful that having once seen her one has no longer any love left for things on earth."*

Nevertheless, even from the contemplation of these imperfect representations her soul would rise to heaven. One day, when she was alone in the infirmary dusting the furniture, she was seen through the half-opened door to pause, brush in hand, in front of the mantelpiece. She was gazing intently at the Madonna, smiling tenderly the while. Then, taking her in her hands, she kissed her with pious respect, replaced her, and resumed her work.

"In 1872 I was at the Mother-House on the occasion of a retreat," writes a religious, "and met Sister Marie-Bernard in company with the venerable Mother Stanislas Crosnier and two Sisters from Lourdes.

"I offered her on behalf of my Superior an engraving representing the Blessed Virgin, with a child at her feet gazing at her with rapture. As she looked at it Sister Marie-Bernard raised her eyes towards heaven, her face lit up and assumed an expression which I can find no words to describe. We were all struck with it. A tear moistened her cheek, and, looking at us, she exclaimed with emotion: 'We



*Interior of the Chapel containing the tomb of
Sister Mary Bernard*

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ought always to behave thus with the Blessed Virgin, like children at their Mother's side.' "

What an epitome of her own history! It was easy to see how she was consumed with the love of her Divine Mother. "*You can never love her enough,*" she would say to her companions. "*If only you knew how good she is! Always say your rosary devoutly; put yourselves under her protection: you will never do so in vain.*"

When she could snatch a moment she would fly to the chapel, and there she would be found on her knees before the altar of the Blessed Virgin absorbed in prayer. At other times she would resort to the Virgin of the Novitiate, near whom she would install herself on a prie-Dieu in a corner where she could be sure of being undisturbed.¹

"I can still call to mind her face," says a Sister who knew her, "when she was occupied in arranging flowers to deck the Blessed Virgin's statue. But it was the perfume of her own pure soul that was her most acceptable offering to the Immaculate Mother."

Examining her private notes, we shall see how the heart of "the faithful child of Mary" throbs in every page.

She begins thus: "*Journal dedicated to the Queen of Heaven, May, 1866.*

"How happy was I, Blessed Mother, when I had the joy of contemplating thee! How I love to recall those sweet moments passed beneath thy gaze so full of mercy and goodness for us all."

Then she notes a prayer to the Heavenly Queen for the virtue of humility² and adds: "Thou knowest that my joy would be to consecrate myself to the religious life so as to serve more faithfully thyself and thy Divine Son. I pray thee to remove every

¹Details supplied by religious who were contemporaries.

²Given in full on another page; see Chapter III "The Religious."

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obstacle that may exist, for thou canst do it better than any other."

When at last she safely reached the hallowed oasis of the religious life, she adopted as a divine programme the words of her Director:¹

"Place yourself in the heart of Mary and remain there. Make it your habitation whilst here below." This programme she was destined to carry out to the letter.

When temptation assailed her soul, she would say: "*O Mary, keep Jesus in my heart.*"

"*Not my will, Blessed Mother, but thine, which is always that of Jesus.*"

"*O Mary, tenderest of Mothers, behold thy child who can do no more of herself. Look upon my wants and above all my spiritual distress. Have pity upon me; grant me one day to be in heaven with thee.*"

"*I will do everything to merit heaven. There is my native-land, there I shall find my Mother in all the radiance of her glory, and with her I shall enjoy forever the happiness of Jesus Himself in the perfect security of the blest.*"

When in suffering or trouble, with what perfect simplicity she comes to seek strength and courage in the heart of Mary.

"*Whenever I am suffering from exterior trials, exposed to temptation or desolation of soul, I will ever come and seek refuge in thy heart, sweet Mother, and pray thee not to let me perish, but to grant me the grace to bear them with resignation and confidence and suffer lovingly as thou didst. May I abide, like thee, at the foot of the Cross, if such be the will of thy dear Son.*"

"*O Most Holy Mother of Jesus, thou who didst witness and feel the utter desolation of thy Divine Son, succour me in my hour of need!*"

¹R. P. Douce.

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"O Mother, in thy Heart I come to bury my anguish and to seek strength and courage."

She dedicates to her a veritable litany of confidence and affection:

"O Mother, offer me to Jesus.

"O Mother, take my heart and bury it in the Heart of Jesus.

"O Mother, may my heart hidden in thine, and have no other love than the good pleasure of my Divine Master.

"May I commence here below, my heart in union with thine, to glorify the Lord by the perpetual homage of a perfect submission to His Holy Will.

"O Mary, accept my heart as a victim in expiation of my sins; break it with sorrow as thou wiltst.

"O Mary, for thy sake I make a sacrifice of all created things, that my heart may belong entirely to thee and to Jesus.

"O Mother, come to my aid, grant me the grace to die to myself, so that I may no longer live, except through and for my sweet Jesus.

"O Mother, Fiat! for life, Fiat! in suffering, Fiat! in death, Fiat! evermore in thy sweet heart."

These touching appeals of the "faithful child of Mary" to her Mother afford us a presentiment of Sister Marie-Bernards as the "victim" of Divine Love.

Let us follow her to the end. We shall see how she breathes her last in a supreme appeal to her Mother in heaven.

VI

THE VICTIM

Last days—Death

I L FAUT à Dieu son spectacle," remarks Bossuet, and what spectacle more capable of enrapturing His eyes, than that of a soul shining with the reflected light of the Queen of Heaven and crowned with the nimbus of suffering! Who can fail to recognise in the above the likeness of Sister Marie-Bernard? Humility, purity: facets sparkling in the borrowed radiance of the Immaculate. Suffering, in all its forms so many rays weaving a glory about her head. Her soul is to receive the baptism of woe: the lot of a victim is reserved for her.

The host must be spotless. How spotless it was we may judge from the following incident. Simple as it is, what hidden beauties it reveals.

A religious relates how towards the end of October, 1876, as she was accompanying Sister Marie-Bernard back to the Infirmary, after having attended an instruction delivered by the Chaplain in the Novitiate, the latter remarked: "*O Seraphine,¹ how happy the Chaplain's words have made me!*"

"Why? he only spoke about sin."

"Yes, but did you not hear what he said?"

"What?"

"*He said that we never committed sin without having the intention of doing so. Now I never remember in all my life having ever once had the intention of sinning, so I can never have done so. That is what makes me happy.*"

For this pure soul, God reserved only the delights divinely concealed in the mysterious honey which the Scripture² tells us is "sucked out of the rock" and

¹Sister Marie-Bernard addressed this Sister as Seraphine from the fact of her having played the part in a dialogue given to celebrate the Mother-Mistress' feast.

²Deut. XXXII, 13.

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that celestial oil which "flows from the hardest stone."

She suffered the threefold martyrdom of body, heart, and soul.

Although it would seem that she jealously guarded the secret of her sufferings for Our Lord and perhaps her Director alone, a word to one of her childhood's friends, since become her Sister in religion, is highly significant. Sister Marie-Bernard was suffering at the time from a violent attack of asthma and upon her companion seeking to sympathise with her she replied:

"Yes! certainly it is very painful not to be able to breathe, but it is much worse to be tortured by spiritual sufferings. That is terrible!"

Her director's exhortations and her own private notes reveal to us still more fully the martyrdom of her heart. "God always causes the weight of the cross to fall on the tenderest spot." He knew how deep was the filial affection of Sister Marie-Bernard for her Superiors. In His hands they were destined to become the tools whereby that martyrdom was to be consummated.

We have already outlined the portrait of the Reverend Mother Josephine Imbert, of whom it has been said that endowed with a man's intelligence she nevertheless possessed a woman's heart and understood admirably how to reconcile her qualities of heart and head. She so dreaded, however, for the favoured child of Lourdes, the terrible perils of pride, that when dealing with her the latter was most evident. She believed it to be her duty to treat her with coldness and even severity, and to humiliate her upon every possible occasion. No matter how her heart rebelled against this self-imposed rôle, she sustained it to the end, a sufficient proof of the lofty

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opinion her superior intellect had conceived of Bernadette's virtues."¹

Bernadette herself suffered keenly under this treatment, the more so that the Mother's habitual manner of dealing both with novices and professed sisters was quite otherwise; her goodness was captivating. She had always ready for each a cheering word full of discernment and spirituality, uplifting, strengthening, or consoling, as occasion required; so that every one believed herself to be the object of her special solicitude.

Towards Sister Marie-Bernard alone she assumed an attitude which inflicted a real martyrdom on the young religious, contracting her heart with fear whenever it felt the desire to expand with holy affection. She suffered in silence; no word of complaint ever fell from her lips.

Her Director's approval encouraged her to persevere in this course.

"Keep close to Our Lord in the Tabernacle," said he; "make your habitation secure within it and never leave it. Look at Our beloved Master: He suffers without a word: He does not even stir, He who in a moment could reduce everything to nothingness.

"Constantly recall the words addressed to you by the Blessed Virgin: *Penance! Penance!* You should be the first to put them into practice.

"In order to do so, support everything in silence for the greater glory of Jesus and of His Holy Mother.

"Yes," writes Sister Marie-Bernard in her private notes, "*I will bear the cross concealed within my heart, with courage and generosity.*

"Yes, my Jesus, be Thou henceforth my life, my all. *I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest.*"

¹"Notice on the life of Sister Marie-Bernard Soubirous," by Mgr. Foreade.

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"What folly," she writes when sorrow made its inroads upon her, "to shrink back when Our Lord seeks our hand to nail it to the cross! Henceforth the more I am crucified, the more I will rejoice!

"My God, give me, I pray Thee, the love of the Cross."

The Superior General was ably seconded by the Novice-Mistress, Mother Marie-Thérèse Vauzou. Her sterling qualities, both of mind and heart, her elevation of soul combined to make of her a woman above the ordinary. Later on, by the votes of her Sisters in religion, she was maintained for eighteen consecutive years at the head of the congregation.

She had, as we have remarked, a veritable passion for the fashioning of souls. We have seen to what trials she subjected Bernadette during her novitiate. During the frequent illness of the Mother General, a portion of her authority over the professed Sisters would in her absence devolve upon Mother Marie-Thérèse, who temporarily replaced her. It entered into God's designs that the Novice-Mistress should concur with the Superior in the accomplishment of that mysterious process, whereby the soul of His "victim" was to be fashioned.

And as if to render easier a task naturally repugnant to the great and loving heart of Mother Marie-Thérèse, He permitted for His own purposes that with all her perspicacity she should always remain ignorant of the wealth of Sister Marie-Bernard's interior life. This was necessary to enable her to reconcile with her upright and sensitive conscience the exercise of such excessive severity as would astonish us did we not recognise the hand of God therein. It was He who placed her on the cross: the others were simply His instruments. So true is it, that later on Mother Marie-Thérèse was herself astonished at her harshness and even uneasy about it. God, who had only employed her as a tool, caused

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her, during a visit to one of the Community in the south of France, to make the acquaintance of a holy religious, Father Jean, Abbot of Fontfroide, popularly regarded as a *thaumaturge*. She afterwards related how he had reassured her and indeed opened up to her new horizons on the ways of God in the guidance of souls.

The religious themselves had a deep veneration for Sister Marie-Bernard, but desirous of falling in with the views of their Superiors, they for the most part kept their sentiments to themselves.

Furthermore, the dealings of the Lord with souls often escape the most penetrating gaze and remain an inscrutable mystery. Who can undertake to lift the veil which shrouds them? We must admit that more than one religious was completely baffled. They failed to perceive that God was at the bottom of the Superior's harsh treatment of Sister Marie-Bernard and so perhaps unknowingly, contributed to Our Lord's work in the soul of one of whom He desired to make a victim.

Sister Marie-Bernard abandoned herself to the Divine Master; to Him she went for help and consolation. Let us again open the note-book which has already afforded us several glimpses of her inner self.

What do we read?

"A spouse of Jesus Christ, in physical or moral suffering, should never allow any word to escape her but this: Yes, My God; without an 'if' or a 'but.'"

"O my Lord, if I may not shed my blood or give my life for Thee, at least let me die to all that is displeasing to Thee. Cross of my Saviour, Blessed Cross, sweetest Cross, in thee alone I place my hope, from thee alone I draw strength and joy.

"It is in the Heart of Jesus that I desire to learn to suffer and to love, in It alone can I find true consolation.

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"O Jesus! Jesus! I no longer feel my cross when I think of Thine.

"For love of Jesus, I will do violence to my feelings even in the smallest matters.

"My Jesus, I suffer and I love Thee. . . .

"I suffer. . . it is towards Thee, my Comforter that my lamentations rise unceasingly. It is into Thine adorable Heart that I shed my tears. To It I confide my sighs and my anguish. To Its great sorrows I confide my own. Grant, O my Jesus, that they may be sanctified by this holy union.

"O Jesus! give me, I implore thee, the bread of Patience to support the grief which tortures my heart. O Jesus! Thy will is to crucify me. . .
FIAT!

"Give me the bread of strength, that I may be able to suffer: grant that I may see Thee alone in all things and for ever."

She made her own the following words which we find transcribed in her notes:

"O Jesus, keep me beneath the standard of Thy Cross. May I guard the crucifix not only before my eyes and upon my breast, but within my heart, living within me. May I become myself a living crucifix, transformed into Thee by the Eucharistic union, by meditation on Thy life, by studying the inmost aspirations of Thy Heart, winning souls not to myself, but to Thee, from the summit of that cross, to which as a living victim Thy love has attached me for ever."

The present is an opportune moment for consecrating a few lines to the memory of Mother Nathalie Portal, second assistant to the Superior General, and Mother Eleonore Cassagnes, Secretary General, both of whom, in their inmost hearts, were unceasing in their gratitude to the Immaculate Virgin for having entrusted such a treasure to the family of the Sisters of Nevers. Understanding, as they did, what heroism was implied in the endurance of such continual

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sufferings with so loving a generosity, they admired Sister Marie-Bernard. They found means to testify discreetly their spiritual affection and minister encouragement to her. Mother Eleonore especially was for twelve years her particular friend and confidante. These two souls had an affinity one for the other. Both were filled with the love of God, both were unceasing in their prayers for the conversion of sinners and the propagation of the faith.

Let us anticipate events for a moment. In the month of October, 1906, twenty-seven years after her death, the fame of Sister Marie-Bernard's sanctity was growing from day to day. The Superior General foreseeing that it might possibly enter into the designs of Divine Providence to cause the seal of the Church to be at some future time set upon it, requested Mother Eleonore, then lying seriously ill in the infirmary, to dictate to a secretary her recollections of the Servant of God. It was a keen and sacred joy to her to reveal what she had learned in twelve years' contact with Sister Marie-Bernard. On Christmas day of the same year she signed with a trembling hand the statement she had dictated. It was the last signature she ever gave, in matters concerning the Congregation.

To resume our subject. In addition to the martyrdom of the heart there was that other martyrdom inflicted upon her keen and eager temperament by the helplessness to which her sickness reduced her. She was extremely active, and even when confined to her bed would not allow her hands to remain idle. Her great desire would have been to devote herself to the nursing of the sick or the care of the children; but accustomed as she was to look at all things from a supernatural point of view, she writes: "Rejoice, my soul, at having one more trait of resemblance to Jesus: remaining hidden and helpless.

"My Divine Spouse has given me a predilection for

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the humble and hidden life. Often has He told me that my heart will know no rest till I have sacrificed everything to Him, and to persuade me to that course has bid me reflect how in the hour of death I shall have no Comforter but Jesus and Jesus crucified; that it is He alone that my cold hand will grasp, He alone who will not fail me on the brink of the tomb. O folly of follies, to attach myself to aught but Him!"

"It is necessary that I should become a victim," she writes in another place. She seemed to be fully aware that such was Our Lord's definite call to her.

On one occasion a Superior visiting her on her bed of suffering said:

"What are you doing there, little Lazybones?"

"My dear Mother, I am working at my own calling."

"And what may that be?"

"Being ill."

And with what simplicity she fulfilled this high calling! She writes on June 27th, 1876, to one of the Sisters of Lourdes: "What can I tell you about myself? That I am still in my little white chapel. I have been able, however, these last three Sundays to assist at Holy Mass. I go back to bed immediately after. I have completely lost the use of my legs and have to submit to the humiliation of being carried in an armchair, but the Sisters do it with such good will that the sacrifice is, after all, not very heavy. I am always afraid they may strain themselves, but when I say so, they laugh and declare that they could easily carry four of my weight."

Jesus was her Comforter in her constant suffering. From Cahors, a Superior having sent her a crucifix, she writes: "I have long been wishing for a large crucifix to place near my bed; how can I sufficiently express my gratitude to you for having sent it to me? As I pressed it to my lips I said to myself what a

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happy inspiration of my dear Mother Sophie! I have obtained permission to keep it and *I am happier with my crucifix over my bed than a queen on her throne.*"

To a party of novices who paid her a visit one feast day, Sister Marie-Bernard expressed the happiness she experienced during her hours of sleeplessness, which permitted her to enter into closer union with Our Lord. Then pointing to a little gilt monstrance pinned to the bed-curtains she said: "The sight of it gives me the desire and the strength for self-immolation and more than ever at the moment when I feel my loneliness and suffering the most."

We have arrived at the period where in addition to her attacks of asthma, hæmorrhage, and oppression of breathing, she was subjected to intolerable torture caused by an abscess which had formed on her right knee. This was during the course of the winter of 1877. Afterwards an enormous tumour appeared accompanied by ankylosis of the joint. Her sufferings were so acute that the religious exhausted every means that their charitable ingenuity could devise to calm them.

Her face became cadaverous; she appeared like one already dead. She passed sleepless nights and if, worn out with fatigue, she drowsed for a moment now and then, it was to wake again to a relentless martyrdom of pain. At times when endurance failed, it was impossible for nature to repress a plaint, but no sooner had she gained the mastery over the agony than she humiliated herself, begged for pardon and repeated: "*My God, I offer it to Thee: I love Thee.*"

"On one of my visits," writes the Chaplain,¹ in order to encourage her to suffer and die joyfully for the love of God, if such were His will, I spoke to her

¹The Chaplain was at that time Abbé Febvre. He filled this office from October, 1876 to May, 1887.

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of the bliss that would be hers in heaven, as she gazed upon the beauty and wondrous glory of Jesus Christ; and added that in order to form some idea of it, she had only to recall the beauty of Mary Immaculate, which had inundated her soul with joy in the days of the Apparitions."

"Oh," she replied, "*how that thought consoles me!*"

God hides a gift divine in suffering's core;
To suffer is to merit, rise and grow.
My tears, I count my firmest hope below,
Since suffering is my lot, I fear no more.¹

Who better entitled than Sister Marie-Bernard to make these words her own? Yes, her tears were her firmest hope; the first half of the promise made her by her celestial Lady was being realised; why should she not hope for the fulfilment of the second? Nevertheless there was no presumption in her hope. "Yes," she would say, "*the Blessed Virgin promised me heaven, but only on condition that I kept on the straight road, and did what was necessary to merit it.*"

Her soul, moreover, thirsted for God; she was sick with the nostalgia of heaven. "*Heaven! heaven!*" she would sometimes murmur. "*We are told that there have been saints who did not go there straight because they had not sufficiently desired it; as for me that will not be my case. Let us determine to go to heaven; let us work for it; suffer for it,*" she loved to repeat, "*nothing else matters.*"

Our Lord, before severing the ties which bound her to earth, desired to draw closer those which united her to His Heart. On September 22d, 1878, Feast of Our Lady of the Seven Dolours, Sister Marie-Bernard had the joy of celebrating the consummation of the Divine Espousals: she made her perpetual vows.

¹Mgr. Gerbet.

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Now she was more than ever *dedicated* to Jesus, *delivered* over to His crucifying will, and Our Saviour saw, already in the heart of His spouse, the radiance of the transfiguration prepared by her virtues and sufferings. Such were the raptures of this union that Sister Marie-Bernard declared: "*I thought I was in heaven.*"

The dear patient's condition grew daily worse, and with each day her love of her Divine Master waxed greater.

"Abandonment without limit, love and fidelity to Jesus even unto death," she wrote.

"*O Cross, thou art the altar upon which I desire to sacrifice myself by dying with Jesus.*"

"*The Heart of Jesus with all Its treasures is my portion. In It I will live, in It I will die, in peace in the midst of suffering.*"

She wished to strip herself of everything she still possessed, that is to say of a few pious pictures, and gazing at the crucifix she exclaimed: "*For my part, I want only that. It is enough for me.*"

"I believe," says Abbé Febvre, "that God allowed Sister Marie-Bernard to have a presentiment of her approaching end, for, on the occasion of a visit I paid her on the morrow of the Feast of Saint Joseph, upon asking her what grace she had solicited from this great Saint, she replied in an energetic tone: "*I have asked him for the grace of a good death.*"

On Friday, March 28th, the Superior General, the Reverend Mother Adelaide Dons,¹ proposed to her to receive extreme unction, to which she eagerly consented.

¹Mother Adelaide Dons had succeeded in the government of the Institute, Mother Josephine Imbert, deceased March 1, 1878, deeply regretted by her daughters in religion. Mother Marie-Thérèse Vauzou, of whom no mention is made in the last pages of Sister Marie-Bernard's life, had been obliged to withdraw temporarily from the Mother-House in order to regain her health, which had been for some time a cause of anxiety.

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"At two in the afternoon," to quote the words of the Chaplain himself, "I administered the Last Sacraments to her in the presence of many of the members of the Community gathered around her bed. After the brief exhortation I addressed to her, previous to giving her Holy Communion, she desired to speak and pronounced the following words with a firm voice: 'Dear Mother, I ask your forgiveness for all the pain I have caused you by my unfaithfulness in the religious life, and I implore my companions' pardon for the bad example I have given them, *above all for my pride.*' She laid special stress on the last words, as if she sought to humiliate herself more completely. Humble and hidden during her lifetime, her thirst of humility persisted to her last breath.

"All of us who approached her during the last days of her illness remarked that her eyes, always bright and limpid, shone with a striking brilliancy. We were indescribably impressed by their eloquence, especially when she raised them to heaven in the act of breathing, as her bodily strength diminished. It seemed as if, having once gazed upon the supernatural, they burned with increased lustre as the moment approached when the splendours of Paradise were about to be unveiled to her departing soul."

Holy Week was for her, as for her Divine Master, a week of crucifixion: but her patience and resignation kept pace with her sufferings. Temptation came to aggravate her martyrdom. During the night of Easter Monday she experienced a kind of agony and was constantly heard to exclaim: "*Begone, Satan!*" The next morning she told the Chaplain, how the demon had tried to alarm her, and how upon her invoking the name of Jesus, he had disappeared.

When he exhorted her to renew the sacrifice of her life, she exclaimed: "*What sacrifice? It is no sacri-*

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fice to leave this miserable earth, where it is so difficult to serve God."

One of those around her having inquired whether she was suffering very much, she replied:

"It all counts for heaven."

Upon the same person proposing to implore the Immaculate Mother to grant her consolation, she said :

"No, no, not consolation, but strength and patience."

On Easter Wednesday, April 16th, about one in the afternoon, the Chaplain was hurriedly summoned to her side. She was seated in an armchair breathing with great difficulty and suffering cruel agony. She again made her confession with edifying fervour. Then remembering the special blessing, "in articulo mortis," granted her by Pope Pius IX., she asked for the rescript, believing it to be necessary to hold the document in her hand in order to render the privilege effective. She was reminded that the intention sufficed, coupled with the invocation of the Holy Name of Jesus. She immediately repeated the invocation.

Upon Mother Eleonore Cassagnes saying: "Dear Sister, you are now lying upon the Cross" she stretched out her arms like a victim in the form of a cross exclaiming:

"My Jesus, oh, how I love Him!"

Previous to this, rather than be separated from her crucifix, which she was unable to keep constantly in her hands, she begged that it might be fixed on her breast.

The prayers for the dying were recited by those around her. It was touching to hear her repeat in a weak but distinct voice all the acts suggested to her. With deep emotion the bystanders remarked how from time to time she would open her eyes with animation and direct glances of love and supplication towards a crucifix hanging on the wall close to her armchair.



Bernadette in her shrine

An hour before her death she raised her eyes to heaven, where they remained for some time rivetted as upon a fixed point, her face calm and serene, betraying a certain pensive melancholy; then with an indefinable expression, eloquent of surprise rather than pain, she cried: "*Oh! Oh! Oh!*" At the same moment a tremour agitated her whole frame. Soon after her trembling hand fell back upon her heart, she lowered her eyes and exclaimed with emphasis:

"My God, I love Thee with all my heart, with all my soul, and with all my strength."

Shortly afterwards, taking the crucifix in her hands, she kissed it, again asking the forgiveness of the Assistant, Mother Nathalie Portat, who was at her side, for all the trouble that she might have occasioned her, then added: "*I am thirsty.*" Upon being given a drink, she moistened her lips, after having for the last time made the sign of the Cross in her admirable manner. A few seconds later she was heard to murmur: "*Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for me, a poor sinner. . . . a poor sinner. . . .*" The Victim expired peacefully with this last prayer to the Immaculate Virgin still on her lips.

It was a quarter past three on the afternoon of Easter Wednesday, April 16th, 1879.¹

The tidings of her death spread with astonishing rapidity. The next day crowds of persons of all ages and conditions commenced to file through the chapel where Sister Marie-Bernard's remains were exposed. There was a universal desire to behold her, who had remained in such voluntary hiding during her lifetime, and four Sisters were kept constantly occupied, touching her body with the pious objects, to furnish

¹We guarantee the accuracy of the above details and wherever other narratives of the death of Sister Marie-Bernard differ from them, the latter may be taken to be inexact.

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which the public had ransacked all the shops of Nevers.

Men and women of the working class, who arrived unprovided, presented their tools, their scissors or thimbles, to be applied to the body of the Servant of God. The death of this humble religious, whose one desire had been to shun notoriety, assumed the proportions of a veritable event at Nevers.

A goodwife, expressing her distress at not yet having had an opportunity to see her, exclaimed: "They ought to have placarded the news of the Saint's death all over the city."

Another, meeting one of the Sisters of the Mother-House in the grounds, stopped her to ask at what hour the funeral was to take place. On being informed that Sister Marie-Bernard's remains were not to be taken to the cemetery but kept within the convent precincts, she replied: "You are keeping her! Oh! how glad I am! Ah, Sister, saving your leave, she was more than a good Christian, she was a real saint."

The major of the regiment then stationed at Nevers came himself to pray at the foot of her coffin. He prayed as he had never done before.

His wife was at that moment lying dangerously ill; when he returned home he found her up and well. In gratitude for such a favour, both husband and wife went to confession the same evening, to Father Cachet, the Chaplain of the Hospital. The worthy priest himself relates the fact. Two youths, who had remarked mockingly, "Come along, let's go and see the saint with the rest," were no sooner face to face with her remains than they were visibly impressed and assumed a profoundly respectful attitude like those around them. They left with a subdued expression and lowered heads, and parted without a jest or even a word.

So great were the throngs that the Bishop's permission was obtained to continue the exposition an extra

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day, and it was on Saturday, April 19th, that the funeral rites were celebrated.

There was general astonishment on that day at the railway station, at the sight of the numberless passengers alighting at Nevers. "What is the excitement about?" was the cry. "Bernadette's funeral" or "The saint's funeral," was the reply.

Mgr. Lelong, Bishop of Nevers, interrupted his pastoral visitation to return and preside at the ceremony. He was surrounded by eighty priests. Amongst those present were: Father Sempé, Superior of the Fathers of the Grotto; Abbé Pomian, Chaplain of the Hospital at Lourdes, and Mr. Henri Lasserre, the Historian of Our Lady of Lourdes.

His Lordship, in an eloquent panegyric, taking for his text the words of the Book of Tobias, "*It is good to hide the secret of the King: but honourable to reveal and confess the works of God*," extolled the humility and purity of the confidante of the Immaculate Virgin.¹ The Requiem Mass was sung by the Cathedral choir, and subsequently, to the disappointment of a multitude of persons who, having been unable to gain access to the chapel of the convent, lined both sides of the road leading from St. Gildard to the cemetery, in the vain hope of being able at least to offer a passing tribute of respect to the remains of her whom popular opinion hailed as a saint, the body of Sister Marie-Bernard was borne through the midst of an affluence of spectators, filling to overflowing the courts and terraces, and deposited in the Chapel of St. Joseph, situated in the grounds of the Mother-House. Every one coveted a last glimpse at the tranquil features of Mary's privileged child. When the moment for closing the coffin arrived, it was remarked that Sister Marie-Bernard's limbs were as flexible as in life; her hands and finger-

¹We have already given elsewhere several extracts from this superb allocution.

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nails retained their normal colour; no sign of decomposition was visible although it was the fourth day after her death. The Abbé Grouzard, Archpriest of the Cathedral, invited the Government Commissary, who was present, to note these phenomena.

He was so impressed that he thereupon asked permission to touch her virginal body with a medal, being himself desirous to possess a souvenir of Sister Marie-Bernard.

In the course of the afternoon, the members of the Council of the community, together with several distinguished personages, returned to the chapel, where the coffin had been deposited on the steps of the altar, and recited the rosary. Father Sempré, Superior of the Fathers of Lourdes, discoursed upon the different various mysteries.

An official minute of the proceedings was enclosed in the coffin, which was then sealed down.

Almost at once it became a favourite practice to come and pray beside the coffin of her who was so humble, although so favoured. The story is still told of how a charming child of five years, Louis Cotté, upon being taken to the chapel, approached the coffin, still lying on the altar steps pending the completion of the vault, and prayed like a little angel. "Come, Louis," called his mother several times, but to each summons the child replied, "Presently, Mamma; I have not yet finished my prayer." At last he rose from his knees, and laying upon the coffin the daisies with which both his hands were filled, he formed them into the shape of a wreath, with touching piety and affection.

Sister Marie-Bernard must have smiled at the sight of this artless tribute, and the child who offered it little knew how truly symbolical of the humble religious were the flowers of simplicity, humility, and purity he strewed upon her.

VII

THE TOMB SOME ANSWERS TO PRAYERS ADDRESSED TO BERNADETTE

IN THE centre of the grounds attached to the Mother-House stands a little chapel constructed in the purest thirteenth century Gothic and dedicated to St. Joseph. Mgr. Dufêtre, a bishop of whom it has been justly observed that he was mighty in word and in deed, an apostle whose ardent zeal overstepped the boundaries of France, found strength enough, ill as he was, to bless this oratory a few days before his death, which occurred on October 24th. 1860. His affection for the Congregation of the Sisters of Nevers was so sincere that they looked upon him as the second founder of their community. By his own special desire, after his decease, his heart was confided to their filial guardianship.

The chapel had originally been destined as an ex-voto of gratitude for the restoration to health of this worthy Prelate.

His condition giving rise to much anxiety, and a stay in the south having been recognised as imperative, the doctors hesitated in their choice between Nice and Montpellier. The latter obtained the preference. His medical advisers took into consideration its possession of a faculty of Medicine, whilst the Bishop himself was not indifferent to the attraction offered by the existence at Montpellier of two houses of the Sisters of Nevers, where he was assured of finding himself immediately at home. One of these was the Madeleine, which is still flourishing, the other the Ecole Normale, where he took up his temporary residence. Mother Marie-Thérès Vauzou was Superior of the latter House. She regarded it as an

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opportunity to manifest by tender and delicate attentions the filial gratitude of the Congregation. It was she who suggested the idea of promising to St. Joseph the erection of an Oratory in his honour in the grounds of St. Gildard if the prayers for the Bishop's recovery were acceded to.¹ Unknowingly, she was preparing the resting-place of the blessed child whom six years later the Immaculate Virgin was to confide as a novice to her maternal care: the tomb of Sister Marie-Bernard.

We have seen how the mortal remains of the Confidante of Mary were laid therein at the close of the obsequies, which constituted a veritable triumph for the humble religious. Solitude, foliage and flowers combine to create a poetic setting to this virginal sepulchre: the unpretentious stone which covers it adds a note of austere simplicity. It bears the following inscription:

HERE REPOSES
IN THE PEACE OF THE LORD

BERNADETTE SOUBIROUS:

FAVOURED AT LOURDES IN 1858
WITH NUMEROUS APPARITIONS OF THE
MOST HOLY VIRGIN:
IN RELIGION

SISTER MARIE-BERNARD:

DECEASED AT NEVERS
IN THE MOTHER-HOUSE
OF THE SISTERS OF CHARITY
APRIL 16TH, 1879
IN THE 36TH YEAR OF HER AGE
AND THE 12TH OF HER RELIGIOUS PROFESSION

¹A very marked improvement had led to hopes of a complete recovery, which accounts for the construction of the Oratory.

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And as epitaph—the words of the Psalmist, expressing Sister Marie-Bernard's oft-repeated desire to be buried at Nevers in the midst of her Sisters in religion,

*This is my rest forever and ever,
Here will I dwell, for I have chosen it.*

Psalm CXXXI. v. 14.

Thereupon follows the Church's aspiration for those of her children whose exile is at an end.

REQUIESCAT IN PACE

The whole surmounted by the device :

DEUS CHARITAS EST

Above which is graved the cross triumphant.

All is symbolism here: the heart that lies beneath this stone, though it has ceased to beat, was in very truth consumed by charity and upon it the cross had left deep-set its divine imprint.

Light is admitted to the chapel by three stained-glass windows, subduing and softening it, as if to cast a shroud of mystery about the last abode of this lover of the hidden life.¹ By a providential dispensation, St. Joseph, from whom Sister Marie-Bernard had asked the grace of a happy death, occupies the centre light, as if still continuing to watch over his protégée, whilst the side one are filled by two great Saints: St. Augustine holding in his hand his great work, the "*Civitas Dei*," open at the title-page, reminding us of the sacred soil of Lourdes, domain of Mary, City of God upon earth; and St. Dominic, apostle of the Rosary and devout servitor of the Queen of Heaven.

¹These windows were placed at the time the chapel was built.

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Might it not well be supposed that the Immaculate Virgin herself had inspired the details of the tomb wherein the child of her predilection was to be laid.

From the very beginning the tomb became the favourite resort of pious souls, and, as time went on, their numbers continually increased. Every class of society was represented: the educated mingled with the unlettered, whose limitations are amply compensated for by their sure instinct in the things of God. Great personages, such as the Comtesse d'Eu, the ex-Empress of Brazil, many bishops, priests, and faithful from all parts of the world, came thither to pray.

How many, kneeling at her grave, have experienced a subtle influence taking possession of their souls and leading them to God. How many others have there received light from on high to be the guiding star of their existence, consolation to soothe their troubles, strength to awaken the energies of their failing courage! How many spiritual as well as temporal favours have there been dispensed! How many cures wrought! Amongst a multitude of others, let us cite the following cases:

A lady from Paris was cured on January 21st, 1889, of chronic deafness of twenty years' standing, after having prayed at the tomb.

Another Parisian relates how on July 20th, 1897, his eyes were completely cured, after having rubbed them on nine successive days with a forget-me-not which he had previously placed upon the grave of Bernadette, at the same time addressing a prayer to the Servant of God.

A young girl of Lajouanie-Campourie, Canton of St. Amand-des-Cot (Aveyron), was cured of lupus, covering all one side of her face, by the application of a linen cloth which one of her aunts, a religious of Nevers, had laid on the tomb of Sister Marie-Bernard.

Apart from the testimony of numberless visitors,

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there exists a voluminous correspondence which affords further evidence of the high reputation for sanctity in which the Apostle of Mary was held. The letters asking for prayers and relating favours attributed to the intercession of the Servant of God are to be numbered by the thousand. These communications came from every corner of the globe, so universal is the confidence of the faithful in the protection of her whom Mary herself beatified.

Even at the time of her death, the Abbé Barrère, Curé of Lourdes, in announcing to his parishioners a service for the repose of the soul of Sister Marie-Bernard, added: "Whilst praying for Bernadette, we may at the same time invoke her, for she manifested all the characteristics of predestined souls: virginity, humility and suffering: her whole existence was illumined by the rays of the Immaculate Conception.

Eminent personages, such as the Comtesse de Chambord, the Duchess of Parma, the King and Queen of Spain, have solicited and accepted with gratitude little souvenirs of the Blessed Virgin's favoured child.

Every day urgent requests for relics are received, pieces of clothing or other articles, for God is pleased to answer favourably prayers addressed to Him through the intercession of Sister Marie-Bernard.

It would be impossible for us to mention separately all these answers to prayer, but it may be of interest to our readers to glance at a few amongst them. We confine ourselves to a bare statement of the facts, without pronouncing on the supernatural character which appears to be attached to them, leaving the Church to be sole judge in matters of such delicacy.

A young lady of Neufchateau (Vosges) testifies to having been cured of coxitis (inflammation of the hip joint) by the intercession of Sister Marie-Bernard.

In 1881 at Bagnères-de-Bigorre (Hautes-Pyrénées), a

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child of between four and five years of age, deprived of the use of its legs, was cured on the last day of a novena made to Bernadette. (A scrap of linen which had belonged to Sister Marie-Bernard was sewed into one of the little sufferer's stockings.)

A religious, Sister Agatha of the Infant Jesus, writes on April 17th, 1882, declaring herself to have been instantly cured of an affection of the eyes through the invocation of Bernadette.

A young man of Brenat, Canton of Montignac (Dordogne), suffering in 1886 from phthisis (tubercular disease of the lungs) and in danger of death (he had already received the Last Sacraments), obtained his recovery as the result of a novena made to Sister Marie-Bernard. (A scrap of linen which had been used by the Servant of God was applied to the sufferer, he was even given a morsel of it reduced to powder and mixed in a beverage.)

From Mustapha Supérieur (Algeria), the Superior of the Sisters of Providence, relates how on October 28th, 1890, a Sister of her Community, who had almost lost her sight, and in addition had suffered from internal hemorrhage during the previous twelve months, and was apparently incurable, was restored to perfect health by the application of a *picture coloured by Sister Marie-Bernard*, accompanied by an invocation of the Servant of God.

On May 11th, 1898, a young orphan girl of Beauvais was about to undergo an operation for the removal of a cyst. On the last day of a novena, addressed to Bernadette, and after the application of a morsel of linen which had belonged to the Servant of God, the tumour entirely disappeared.

A young woman of Bourlon (Pas-de-Calais) whose lower limbs were completely paralysed, the result of an accident (a wagon laden with four tons of stone had passed over her legs), was *instantly* cured upon

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kissing a relic of Bernadette and invoking her with confidence.

On August 16th, 1907, at Bordeaux, an infant of two years old in danger of death was cured by the application of a morsel of linen which had been worn by Sister Marie-Bernard.

A religious of Montboubon, Commune of Roanne (Cantal), asserts that she was *instantaneously* cured on December 24th, 1907, of an acute inflammation of the eyes, productive of almost complete blindness, after having invoked Bernadette and kissed one of her relics.

To Sister Marie-Bernard is attributed the recovery of a little girl of six of Castelnaudary (Aude), who on September 6th, 1908, met with an accident entailing a double fracture of the vault of the cranium at the base of the parietals. After invocation of Bernadette a relic of the Servant of God had been placed beneath the child's head.

A religious suffering from acute gastro-enteritis, and in danger of death, at the Pammatone Hospital at Genoa, declares that she was restored to health by the intercession of Bernadette, whom she had invoked with confidence.

A novice of the congregation of the Christian Brothers who was suffering from a wen upon each of his knees, testifies to their *instantaneous* disappearance upon the application of a scrap of linen which had belonged to Sister Marie-Bernard.

At Florence, on September 18th, 1909, a religious afflicted with a string of cancerous glands, extending from both breasts to underneath the arm-pits (the nature of the malady had been clearly specified by the doctor, who had given a very conclusive certificate), saw them disappear at the conclusion of a double novena to Bernadette, accompanied by the application of a relic of the Servant of God. It was at the moment of operating that the doctor perceived

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the disappearance of the glands. Since that time the religious has enjoyed better health than ever.

As we are dealing with the subject of glands assuming a cancerous form, let us add that three other persons have witnessed their disappearance after the application of a scrap of linen of which Sister Marie-Bernard had made personal use.

The Superior of the Sisters of St. Louis-de-France in the Province of Quebec, Canada, who was suffering from angina pectoris and chronic myocarditis, was suddenly cured of the angina on December 8th, 1909, and of the myocarditis on the 11th of the same month, after having invoked Bernadette and applied a relic of the Servant of God to the diseased parts. Her malady was complicated by dropsy, congestion of the kidneys and cardiac asthma in an acute form. The doctor declared in a certificate that her complete recovery, surprising as it was unexpected, could not be attributed to any medical treatment.

On August 2nd, 1909, a communication was received at the Mother-House to the following effect: A young girl of Abbeville (Somme) suffering from an acute osteomyelitis of the leg and arm had been about to undergo the amputation of the leg in the first place, when a novena to Bernadette, together with the application of a piece of linen having belonged to her, had produced a gradual restoration to health of the diseased limb. The condition of the arm had remained unchanged. The surgeon had declared that it must come off. Nothing had been said to the patient, but the relic was again applied. The following day the doctors arrived with their instruments. The girl's mother ran to meet them, saying: "I have said nothing to my daughter about an operation; leave your instruments downstairs and break the news to her yourselves." Upon going up and examining the patient, the surgeon exclaimed:

"This is quite inexplicable, every trace of disease

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has disappeared." He left without operating. The young girl now walks without difficulty, and carries about with her the soiled relic enclosed in a golden heart.

In January, 1910, at Eauze (Gers), a young consumptive of twenty-three, who had already vomited several quarts of blood, was given up by his doctor. Large cavities existed in his right lung and there was congestion of both. A novena to Bernadette was commenced and he carried her picture about him. The hemorrhage ceased, and the following day, when the doctor auscultated him, he could not repress a cry of astonishment.

"I defy any medical man in the world," said he, "no matter how eminent he may be, to find any trace of disease remaining; both are cicatrized, all danger is over."

The young man obtained a complete recovery.

On November 12th, 1910, an inhabitant of the village of Agriez, Commune of Moraches (Nièvre), was cured (by the application, for twenty-five minutes, of a morsel of Bernadette's linen) of diploplia¹ of the left eye, owing to paralysis of one of the right muscles of that organ, indicative of a disturbance (probably a slight hemorrhage) localised at the centre of the sixth right pair of nerves; as also of acute glaucoma² of the right eye.

We borrow the words of the certificate delivered by the doctor.

Another case comes from Paris. A young religious attacked by phthisis, with frequent hæmorrhage of the lungs, lesion of the larynx and dysphasia, had been unable to take any nourishment other than a little liquid from the month of October up to January 19th,

¹A disease of the eye in which the patient sees an object double or even triple.

²Opacity of the vitreous humour, giving the eye a bluish green tint.

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1911, upon which day she received the Last Sacraments. The doctor gave no hope and declared that she might die at any moment.

Aware that there was no longer any hope of her recovery she commenced a novena to Sister Marie-Bernard, to obtain the favour of dying on February 11th, anniversary of the first of the Apparitions. On the evening of that day the fever had increased, but the Sister was somewhat disappointed at her request not having been granted.

However, God's designs upon her were quite other, for during the night of the 11th she was suddenly restored to health. Her voice recovered its natural tone, the hæmorrhage ceased, she was able to retain all kinds of nourishment, and to leave her bed, whilst her general condition was satisfactory.

At Liège, Mademoiselle L..., who had been suffering since 1907 from a fibrous tumour of the uterus in a state of carcinomatous degeneration, had given up all hope of recovery. In July, 1911, turning to Heaven for help, she communicated with the Mother House, obtained a relic of Bernadette, and began an uninterrupted series of novenas to Our Lady of Lourdes through the intercession of her little confidante.

Her condition however continued to be equally grave and painful until February 1912, when, after particularly acute sufferings, on the last day of a novena begun on the 11th, the anniversary of the first Apparition, she found herself cured. The Doctor could discover no further trace of the tumour. Since then Mlle L... has shown none of the symptoms of her terrible illness, and her health continues to be excellent. She was able to be present at Rome for the feast of the Beatification of her powerful patroness.

Sister Marie-Mélanie M... afflicted since 1910 with an ulcerated stomach which prevented from taking any food whatsoever, had the consolation, though at

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hire price of terrible sufferings, of kneeling on the tomb of Bernadette in July 1912. After an hour of fervent prayer her strength was entirely renewed; she was able to eat, and to walk alone, and returned to her community at Moulins (Allier) quite cured. Several doctors established the fact that her cure was both complete and sudden. From that day, Sr Marie-Melanie returned to her works of charity without being restricted to any special diet. She had the joy of assisting at the triumph of Blessed Bernadette on June 14th, 1925.

During the war, also, Mary's humble messenger was pleased to play an active part. Numbers of letters have been received testifying to the power of her protection over those who were entrusted to her care.

Commandant D..., exposed to the "greatest dangers throughout the whole of the duration of hostilities, escaped without hurt. His decoration, deposited in homage at Bernadette's tomb, is a reminder of his confidence in her, and of the constant and visible watch she kept over him.

On November 13th, 1914, in particular, he was the object of her special protection. Shrapnel from a bursting shell pierced his left saddle-bag, and tore his woollen helmet to shreds. The other saddle bag was also slightly pierced, and a third shot found its way beneath the saddle itself. His horse had the femoral artery shattered. Lieutenant D... was untouched.

Commandant X... was several times miraculously preserved. On August 28th, 1911, he rallied his troops round the flag under a heavy fire, and came off without a scratch. He carried a relic of Bernadette upon him, and after the war he acknowledged that she had constantly protected him.

The Vicomtesse de V... expresses her gratitude to Bernadette for safeguarding her husband. In April

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1917, a shell fell upon his dug-out, and although temporarily buried, he escaped unhurt. In May, a German 600 kil. mine exploded, and practically wiped out his section. He himself received no further hurt than a few splashes of mud. Writing afterwards, he said : "It was Bernadette who saved me."

From the Convent of Jesus-Marie, at Lauzon (Canada), we receive the following, written on February 20th, 1916 :—A little girl of four years old was entirely paralysed with the exception of the brain. The doctors of the Hospital of Quebec, after a careful examination of the patient gave the following verdict. "The case is incurable, not that there is at present any danger of death, but she will never recover the use of her limbs." A relic of Bernadette was placed on the child, and a novena was begun to the Confidante of Mary. Shortly afterwards the appy mother had the joy of writing : "My little girl is cured! She walks! Thanks be to God! Bernadette has shown the power of her intercession."

A governess from Ch.... (Loiret), writing on April 15th, 1917, relates the marvellous cure of one of her little pupils. In the autumn of 1914, Odilia, aged five, was attacked by a serious form of hip-disease. The leg thus afflicted was five centimetres shorter than the other, and was moreover much shrunken. The child was cured during the course of a novena to Bernadette in March, 1915, after the application of a relic to the suffering limb. A few days later all lameness disappeared and the leg continued to develop normally.

In June 1919, a little boy in Paris was absolutely despaired of. "There is no hope whatsoever"; the doctor had declared. "Even if he does recover, he will be either an idiot or an epileptic." A little packet of sawdust from Bernadette's coffin was placed under the patient's pillow, and the whole family began a novena. His state still remained hopeless, and a



*Church of the Mother-House of the Sisters
of Charity of Nevers*

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second novena was begun. On the last day, July 7th, the child, who had been like a corpse for three hours during the night, recovered consciousness, speech and sight simultaneously. He asked for something to drink, and took it without ill effects. He was completely cured.

A nun from F... (Madagascar) informed us on November 9th, 1919, of the cure of a young girl who had been suffering from enteritis for two years. Her state was such that she could no longer retain food of any kind, and, as all remedies were unavailing, a speedy death seemed certain. At this juncture, the sick girl thought of making a novena to Our Lady of Lourdes, through the intercession of Bernadette, promising to enter the convent if she recovered. The novena was begun at once, the nuns and children joining their prayers to hers. After four or five days, a very perceptible amelioration was noticed, and this was shortly followed by a complete cure. The girl has kept her promise, and with the whole of her community, continually renews her thanks to Bernadette.

M. and Mme R. H... of Paris had vainly desired a child for twelve years. After invoking Bernadette, a charming little girl was born to them.

At the Convent of the Holy Name of Jesus, Montréjeau, April 10th, 1923, Mme H... was suddenly cured of a sclerosis of the spinal marrow accompanied by a grave lesion in the region of the heart.

A Pilgrimage to Lourdes had brought no relief. Our Lady wished to stand aside and leave the glory of the cure to her privileged child.

On the fourth day of a novena to Bernadette, the patient experienced a feeling of well-being throughout her whole body such as she had not known since the beginning of her illness, which had then lasted for eighteen months. At the same time

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she felt an irresistible impulse to rise from her bed. Opening her New Testament she fell by chance upon the text, "Why are you fearful, oh ye of little faith?" Thus encouraged, Mme H. hesitated no longer. She rose and walked alone, without any difficulty, and proceeding downstairs, appeared in the midst of her friends, smiling and at ease, and walking without *any trace of fatigue*. Her double illness had been instantaneously cured.

Mother Chantal T... relates the following : — One of my cousins, sitting before the fire, noticed the ashes between the andirons which supported the logs moving backwards. She thought at first that the movement was caused by a draught coming down the chimney, but when she saw it twice repeated, quite mystified, she took the shovel to investigate. What was her surprise to find four little packets of saw-dust from Bernadette's coffin underneath the fire-place. My cousin then remembered that she had thrown the envelope which contained the packets into the fire a few minutes before.

At the Hospital of the Fraternity at Roubaix, a nun had been in bed since May 10th, 1923, with vomitings of blood and painful complications. On March, 1925, an abcess formed in the throat which prevented her from absorbing so much as a drop of water. On March 20th she was dying.

On the 21st, the abcess broke, and she managed to swallow a little water. At the same time she thought of opening the sachet containing saw-dust from Bernadette's coffin which she wore round her neck, and extracting a pinch of the saw-dust, put it into the water and drank it. She repeated this process several times, praying meanwhile for her cure with the greatest confidence. From that time onwards she began to take nourishment, and was soon completely cured.

The same nun had lost her sight during her illness.

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She recovered it in the same miraculous way by placing a little saw-dust from Bernadette's coffin on her eyes.

Mr Morin, of Woonsocket U. S. A., was dying of double pneumonia. He had received the last sacraments, and gave no sign of life. Reverend Mother Marie St Olivier, a nun of the Convent of Jésus-Marie, and a devout client of Bernadette, describing the incident, tells us that his family were on the point of preparing for his funeral when one of them suggested placing on him a medal of Bernadette, given to them by the Reverend Mother herself. This was done, and immediately the dying man started up, exclaiming: "What are you putting on me?" Then, amidst the joy of all those present, he took and kissed the medal. His progress after this was rapid; he was soon able to resume his ordinary occupations, and his health is now excellent.

To the letter informing us of this cure were appended the Doctor's certificate, and the signatures of the principal witnesses, notably of his brother-in-law, Mr Ernest Maclure, at present—November 1926—Président of the Knights of Columbus at Woonsocket; of Mrs Morin, and of Reverend Mother Marie St Olivier. This took place a short time before the Beatification of Bernadette.

In May, 1925, a friar of St Anne., Detroit., U. S. A., brought a little relic to a poor Catholic workman, who had broken his leg, and was suffering agonies. The man, with great faith, made a little hole in the plaster and slipped the relic in, so that it would be as close as possible to his knee. The pain disappeared the same day, and soon he had entirely recovered. When the plaster was removed, it was found that the little relic had made its way to the exact place of the fracture, and had slipped no further.

So much for temporal favours. If we turn to

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spiritual conversions we may safely say that it would be a difficult task to count them. How could Sister Marie-Bernard, who had been so concerned for sinners whilst on earth, forget them once she was in heaven? Numerous are the letters we receive, couched in such terms as the followings, or others closely resembling them: "A hardened sinner, grievously ill, refused both priest and sacraments, blaspheming like a demon. No sooner had a souvenir of Bernadette been placed under his pillow than a complete transformation took place in his sentiments. He asked for the priest, and died in excellent dispositions."

Count Imbert de la Tour, of the Château de Chevret, near Imphy (Nievre), visited our Mother-Housse in August, 1908, to ask that thanksgivings might be offered for the return to God of Mr. du Périer de Larsan, Deputy of the Gironde, obtained as the result of prayers to Our Lady of Lourdes, through the intercession of Sister Marie-Bernard. In the above instance we are at liberty to state names, the matter having already attracted the attention of the public press.

Many temporal favours, apparently of supernatural origin, have recently been recorded, in addition to seventy-five cases of recovery from sickness, particulars of which have reached us since 1909.

We shall not attempt a detailed enumeration of these; it would occupy too much space were we to recount all the instances wherein the protection of Bernadette is strikingly manifest. This virgin, so pure, "so French"—we repeat "so French"—is she not a flower sprung from our ancient Gallic soil? Mary, who loves France with a special affection, must surely, in her communications with the child, have magnified within her that love of her native land which is too noble and exalted a sentiment to be lacking in the heart of a saint.

In the fifteenth century she gave us Joan of Arc to

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combat "the mail-clad foe;" in the nineteenth, she gave us Bernadette to confound another foe, this time "clad in the armour of sophistry," and now, in the twentieth century, Our Blessed Mother seems to unite them in a single constellation. The Church has decreed to Joan the honour of Canonization, and Bernadette, the Apostle of Mary was raised to the ranks of the Blessed on June 14th, 1925.

To Mgr. Gauthey,¹ one of the most fervent apostles whom the Sacred Heart has vouchsafed to the diocese of Nevers, was reserved the joy—nay, we may say the glory—of inaugurating, at the request of the Reverend Mother Marie-Joséphine Forestier, Superior-General of the congregation in whose bosom Sister Marie-Bernard completed her sanctification, the long procedure which we hope will terminate in the canonisation of the Confidante of Our Lady. The Blessed Virgin appeared at Lourdes to ratify the proclamation by the Church of the dogma of her Immaculate Conception: the Church in her turn, had ratified, by the glorification of Bernadette the words addressed to her by the Blessed Virgin: "I do not promise you that you will be happy in this world, but in the next."

It was on August 20th, 1908, in the chapel of the Mother-House, in the presence of more than two hundred religious, assembled for their annual retreat, that the first session was held of the process known as that of the "Ordinary," that is to say the constitution of the Ecclesiastical Tribunal, whose mission is to gather evidence as to the life, reputation for sanctity and miracles, of the Servant of God.

From the "*Semaine religieuse du diocese de Nevers*" of August 22nd, 1908, we quote the following:

"At the close of the session His Lordship expressed

¹Mgr. Gauthey was one of the fourteen French Bishops consecrated by Pius X. in person on February 25, 1906. He remained only four years at Nevers, being promoted to the Archiepiscopal See of Besançon in January, 1910.

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the happiness he felt at being privileged to commence a Cause so glorious for the Immaculate Virgin, for the Congregation of the Sisters of Nevers, to whom Bernadette was confided by Mary, as also for the Diocese of Nevers itself. He remarked how by a remarkable coincidence the process had been inaugurated under the happiest auspices. It was the feast of St. Bernard, whose name the servant of God had received at baptism; the moment when the crowds attracted to Lourdes by the great National Pilgrimage were thronging about the Grotto where Mary had appeared to Bernadette; moreover, it was the Jubilee year of the Apparitions.

“The emotion displayed by His Lordship in declaring how great would be his satisfaction to see the Cause of Bernadette one day introduced at Rome, produced a lively impression on his auditors and afforded sufficient proof of how dear that Cause was to the heart of the venerated Prelate.”

So great was the diligence and zeal of the eminent members who composed the Ecclesiastical Tribunal, and so ably was the enquiry directed by the excellent Bishop, inspired, as he was, by his devotion to the Immaculate Virgin, and his love of her little Confidante, that in the month of October 1909, the process was ready for transmission to the Sacred Congregation of Rites. No fewer than one hundred and thirty-three sessions had been held.

On September 22nd of the same year, that is thirty years after the burial of Sister Marie-Bernard in the Chapel of St. Joseph, all canonical forms were complied with as to the identification of her mortal remains.

“The exhumation was carried out in the presence of Mgr. Gauthey and of the members of the Ecclesiastical Tribunal, assisted by two doctors,¹ after due fulfil-

¹Messrs. Jourdan du Mazot and David.

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ment of all legal formalities. The coffin was extracted from the vault by workmen specially sworn for the purpose, and carried into a pavillon near the Chapel of St. Joseph. There it was opened. No odour of any sort was perceptible when the lead shell was pierced. The Servant of God appeared clothed in her religious habit. Her face, hands, and forearms¹ were alone visible and appeared of a dead whiteness. Her mouth, slightly opened, disclosed the teeth; her closed eyes seemed somewhat sunken in the sockets. Her hands, which, together with the finger-nails, were in a perfect state of preservation, were crossed upon her breast and interlaced with a rosary devoured by rust. A crucifix covered with verdigris lay upon her breast. On her forearm the veins could be traced in relief.

"The Superior-General of the Sisters of Charity of Nevers and her religious removed the damp clothing and the sawdust mixed with charcoal which surrounded the body : both they and the doctor were able to testify to the fact that, although dried up, it was perfectly intact and bore no trace of corruption."²

The left side of the body from the hip upwards was slightly raised in comparison with the right. The left knee was smaller than the right.³

Her head and hands were gently inclined toward the left, recalling, as was remarked by the venerable Prelate who assisted at the exhumation, that posture so distinctive of many of the young virgins of the first centuries of the Christian Era whose remains have been found in the Catacombs.

The Sisters washed the body. After having once more clothed it with the religious habit, they replaced

¹It seems that the arms had fallen a little to the left, disclosing slightly the flesh near the wrists.—(Ed. Eng. Edition.)

²From the *Semaine Religieuse de Nevers*, Dec. 11th, 1909.

³It will be remembered that during the latter part of her illness Sister Marie-Bernard suffered from a tumour on her right knee.

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it with loving precautions in a new coffin, lined with zinc and padded with white satin. The head rested on a white satin cushion, upon which was painted the monogram of Our Lady of Lourdes. The same monogram was also engraved upon the coffin.

"Alongside the body was placed in a glass phial the official minutes of the proceedings at the exhumation and identification of the body, together with the original minutes of sepulture."

"This double coffin, closed, soldered, screwed down and sealed with the episcopal seal, was carried back and replaced in its vault" (*Semaine Religieuse de Nevers*, Dec. 11th, 1909).

Here leave we in repose this lily fair
Within whose chalice graced, a sweet device,
"AVE MARIA"—love and sacrifice,
To God's own Mother, breathes a ceaseless prayer.

Mother! whene'er we seek this lonely shrine
Where thou with thy fair lily dost abide
Bearing our vows to whisper at her side,
Smile thou upon us, through this flower of thine.

O potent smile, with every day let some
New prodigy adorn this holy place,
So with the glorious dawn that grows apace
The Virgin's tomb, an altar shall become!

VIII

THE TRIUMPH

Those who had felt the charm of Lourdes and Bernadette returned with one wish : to see the tomb of the humble Sister of Nevers become an altar. They were certain that Our Blessed Lady could not long delay the glory of the child she had chosen for her Confidante.

On August 13th, 1913, His Holiness Pope Pius X deigned to sign the decree introducing the Cause of the Servant of God, and conferred upon her the title of Venerable.

On November 18th, 1923, His Holiness Pope Pius XI declared her "a heroine of virtues," "a magnificent example of sanctity," and added that he himself, the Sovereign Pontiff, "desired, in union with his children, to see the speedy elevation of Bernadette Soubirous—Sister Mary-Bernard—to the summit of glory conferred by the Church upon her Saints."

The fulfilment of the wish was not long delayed. On June 2nd, 1925, the reading of the Decree *de Tuto*, not only of Sr Mary Bernard, but also of the Martyrs of Canada, the Martyrs of Corea and of the Rev. F. Eymard, took place in the Consistory. In his reply to the Superior General of the Fathers of the Blessed Sacrament, who thanked him in the name of all present, the Holy Father summed up the decrees in a delightful phrase. "The Martyrs purple blends harmoniously with the virginal lily of purity, and the flame of the Sacrament of Love." It was indeed fitting that Bernadette, who recognised that her daily task was to be a victim, should be placed at the side of the Martyrs; fitting too that this pre-eminent-ly Eucharistic soul should be united to the Apostle of

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the Blessed Sacrament—trinity blessed in the unity of love!

The Mother of God had appeared to Bernadette, to ratify the verdict of Pius IX with the words, "I am the Immaculate Conception." The answer of the Church was now to be proclaimed. "She is Blessed, this Maid to whom Our Lady said. *"I do not promise you that you will be happy in this world, but in the next."*

It was on June 14th that the Church solemnly affirmed this divinely inspired response. Only those who were witnesses of the splendid Ceremony of the Beatification can conceive something of the emotion which filled all beholders when, after the reading of the Decree, the celebrant intoned the *Te Deum*, and the illuminated representation of Bernadette in the "Glory" by Bernin, was unveiled. It was a glimpse of Heaven, a vision accompanied by floods of light and harmony. The Feast was prolonged to a Triduum, and our thanksgiving still continues.

It was now fitting that the Mother-House should honour Bernadette by new and splendid solemnities. On August 3rd, she made her triumphal entry into the Chapel where, forty-six years ago, her corpse exposed immediately before her funeral, had already attracted large crowds. To day she came like a queen, her virginal body still intact in its precious reliquary, which is adorned in a style at once beautiful and symbolic, borne through a dense crowd which could scarcely find accomodation in the spacious court-yards surrounding the Convent. The voice of the venerable Prelate of Nevers retraced her history with emotion, and all acclaimed the humble Sister whom the great Church of God had placed upon her altars.

For three days a continuous stream of pilgrims thronged to the shrine of Our Lady's favoured child, who lay like one of those virgins of the catacombs who have defied the torments of their executioners.

BERNADETTE OF LOURDES

The beautiful decorations of the Chapel, the sweetest music, the highest eloquence, the presence of numbers of dignitaries of the Church united to honour her, but the most impressive tribute of homage was the silence and recollection of the assistants.

And ever since, crowds continue to flock round her. Thousands of pilgrims have come to kneel before this humble nun whose very sight brings peace, and rest, and the spirit of prayer, and day by day others take their place. Cures and spiritual graces are showered upon them in answer to their devotion, and we dare to hope that the day is not far distant when Holy Mother Church will place upon her brow the halo of Sanctity.

ACHÈVÉ D'IMPRIMER
LE 15 FÉVRIER 1927
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